Realizing the Global Promise of the Internet: The Future of Internet Governance

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The United Nations, under a mandate established in 2005 during the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), is in the midst of a five-year global dialogue on Internet Governance. This research study surveyed stakeholders who attended the second Internet Governance (IGF) meeting, held in November 2007 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Responses on the potential and role of global policies were gathered from 206 conference attendees, roughly 15% of the people at IGF, representing more than 60 countries. The online survey, captured thoughts on the key areas being addressed by the forum, as well as the respondents’ general thoughts on foundational concepts applicable to Internet governance. While some countries - such as the United States and Japan - enjoy high levels of Internet diffusion, from a global perspective the Internet reaches just one in five persons. Not surprisingly, survey respondents described access to the Internet as the most important policy objective. Most respondents agreed that a global solution to Internet access is achievable. One in four respondents disagreed with the idea that the Internet has successfully connected the world. Most respondents agreed that without robust Internet access a country will have limited future economic success. Most agreed that global Internet access improves economy, healthcare and education. Strong support was expressed for global policies that establish protocols for disabled users to access the Internet and multicultural content. There was also support for neutral and equitable access to the Internet for all people. Respondents indicated strong support for the establishment global Internet users’ Bill of Rights. Many respondents also indicated strong support for freedom of information on the Internet, but little confidence that a global policy on Internet-content controls could be reached. The study data suggests that global policies are desired and achievable in the Internet-governance arena.