



EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON GLOBAL HARMONIZATION OF ARABIC SCRIPT USE IN DOMAIN NAMES

THIRD MEETING OF THE ARABIC SCRIPT IN INTERNATIONALISED DOMAIN NAMES WORKING GROUP
8-10 November 2008, Cairo, Egypt

Preliminary Information Note

Background

The year 2003 marked a global milestone towards the use of non-ASCII characters in domain names; which were previously restricted to ASCII characters only. The need for standards resulted in the development of a set of Request for Comments (RFCs) and guidelines on Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs).

On the regional level, the year 2003 also marked a unification of efforts in the Arab region towards the use of Arabic characters in domain names following five years of numerous detached attempts and activities. Spearheading those efforts, UN-ESCWA developed the first Internet-Draft entitled "Guidelines for an Arabic Domain Name System" and published it on the IETF website in addition to supporting the League of Arab States (LAS) in their Arabic Domain Names Pilot Project. Later in 2007, UN-ESCWA provided additional finance to the Project on *Promotion of an Arabic Domain Name System (ADNS)*, which essentially aims to further the development of an ADNS that is inter-operable with the global domain name resolution schemes. Recently in 2008, following feedback and discussions made with involved stakeholders, and building on the evolution of the pilot project, the published Internet-Draft was refined and republished by UN-ESCWA, as part of its ADNS project, with emphasis on linguistic aspects.

During the first quarter of 2008, and also as part of the above Project, standardization efforts stepped into a more global dimension as collaboration was initiated with international domain name players such as Afilias and the Public Interest Registry (PIR)¹ as well as communities using languages based on the Arabic script such as Persian and Urdu. As a result, the "Arabic Script in Internationalized Domain Names - Working Group" (ASIWG) was formed as a self-organizing group to collaborate on the use of Arabic script in domain names. So far, ASIWG includes experts from several Arab countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE and Kuwait as well as experts from Iran, Pakistan and other countries using Arabic script in their national languages in addition to experts from the UNICODE and IETF community. ASIWG is coordinated by Afilias, PIR and UN-ESCWA.

ASIWG has thus far organized two main meetings in Dubai in March and May 2008². These meetings set the scene for the envisioned cooperation, defined issues and guidelines while investigating solutions for a number of technical issues pertaining to the use of Arabic script in domain names. ASIWG members also relied on telephone conferences and online discussions³ as a tool to follow-up

¹ Afilias is the global registry service managing *.info* Top Level Domain in addition to providing technical solutions in this field whereas PIR is the organization globally managing *.org* Top Level Domain (TLD).

² The work group has also organized one session during ICANN regional meeting in Dubai, April 2008, as well as during the 32nd ICANN meeting in Paris, June 2008.

³ Online discussions are available at: <http://lists.irnic.ir/pipermail/idna-arabicscript/>

on progress and plan ahead in addition to a wiki website⁴ for archiving documents, presentations and discussions. The Work Group has been able to agree on a number of issues such as the use of diacritics, numerals, <space>, and honorifics.

Keeping with the recommendation on having regular conference calls and in-person meetings back-to-back with global/regional ICANN meetings, the ASIWG plans to hold a meeting on the Global Harmonization of Arabic Script Use in Domain Names as its third meeting in November 2008, directly after the 33rd ICANN meeting in Cairo.

Objectives

The overall objective of the 3rd ASIWG meeting is to advance activities towards developing extended guidelines on the Arabic script-level for multilingual registries. Select members of ASIWG will also serve to review and follow-up on coordination activities on the use of Arabic script in domain names, which were the result of meetings held during Q2 of 2008.

Topics/Issues

Following are the main topics and issues to be discussed at the Cairo meeting:

- (1) Updates on the list of Arabic script characters that should be PVALID or DISALLOWED at the level of IDN protocol and discussion of recent IDNA2008 reviews;
- (2) Character variants tables for each language group;
- (3) Prototype for modelling the behaviour of Zero Width Non Joiner (ZWNJ) with Arabic characters;
- (4) Character normalization lists and corresponding gap analysis in addition to the required liaison with UNICODE;
- (5) Developments/updates on the proposed registration process of languages using Arabic script;
- (6) Considerations for languages newly joining ASIWG activities including African languages and Jawi (Malaysia);
- (7) Updates on the ccTLD fast track;
- (8) Organizational and administrative issues relating to ASIWG as well as its future plans.

Outcomes

The Meeting's expected outcomes are:

- (1) Progress in defining extended guidelines for registries for the use of Arabic script in domain names including linguistic/technical/operational aspects;
- (2) Improved coordination and implementation of potential solutions to technical and policy issues on the use Arabic script in domain names;
- (3) Consensus on pending technical issues such as variant tables, character normalization, etc.;
- (4) Plans for future ASIWG activities.

Organization

The Meeting is organized by UN-ESCWA in collaboration with PIR, Afiliat and the Egyptian National Telecom Regulatory Authority (NTRA) as a local partner, and will be held during 8-10 November 2008 at the Intercontinental Citystars Hotel as per the details below:

⁴ http://www.arabic-script-domains.org/wiki/Main_Page

Intercontinental Citystars Hotel
Omar Ibn El Khattab Street
Cairo 11737, Egypt
Tel: +202 24800100
Fax: +202 24800200

Participation and Registration

Participants in the meeting will include ASIWG members and experts from countries using Arabic script, PIR, Afiliias, UN-ESCWA, NTRA-Egypt in addition to other international organizations. Participants will also include experts from telecom regulatory authority in other UN-ESCWA Member Countries.

Participants are requested to register for the meeting by filling the registration form and returning it by email, to khayat@un.org.

Language

English will be the working language of the Meeting, noting that simultaneous interpretation into Arabic will not be provided.

Travel and Accommodation

Arrangements for accommodation will be communicated to registered participants in due time.

Participants are expected to inquire on their entry visa requirements to Egypt and secure one ahead of the anticipated travel date. If a formal letter of invitation is needed for the visa, participants can request it from UN-ESCWA.

UN-ESCWA will be providing travel and Daily Subsistence Allowance (DSA) to participants from its member countries whose organizations cannot cover their expenses and will accordingly issue them pre-paid air tickets.

Additional information

Submissions, inquiries and requests for additional information should be addressed to:

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