

## ICANN wants to destroy freedom in Internet?

Contributed by Admin  
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ICANN may be trying to become the Net's 'world police,' believes the Non-Commercial Users Constituency (NCUC).

ICANN's policy council, the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO), wants string selection criteria that would prevent the registration of a new gTLD string containing a controversial word or idea, says Blogger News Network.

With that in the background, ICANN's NCUC says it's submitted a proposal to protect freedom of expression and innovation in the introduction of new generic top-level domains (gTLDs).

"In the 13 February 2007 GNSO draft report, proposed Term of Reference 2(v) of the string criteria states that 'the string should not be contrary to public policy (as set out in advice from the Governmental Advisory Committee)'," says the post, going on:

"According to the GAC guidelines: 'No new gTLD string shall promote hatred, racism, discrimination of any sort, criminal activity, or any abuse of specific religions or cultures. ... If the GAC or individual GAC members express formal concerns about a specific new gTLD application, ICANN should defer from proceeding with the said application until GAC concerns have been addressed to the GAC's or the respective government's satisfaction.'

"Unless reformed, this ICANN policy will prevent anyone in the world from being able to use controversial words like 'abortion' or 'gay' in a new gTLD if a single country objects to their use.

"The proposal would further prevent the use of numerous ordinary words like 'herb' and 'john' in a string since they can have an illegal connotation in certain contexts.

The February

13 proposal would essentially make ICANN the arbiter of public policy and morality in the new gTLD space, "a frightening prospect for anyone who cares about democracy and free expression," says Robin Gross, executive director of IP Justice, an NCUC member organization. "The proposal would give ICANN enormous power to regulate the use of language on the Internet and lead to massive censorship of controversial ideas."

Rather than applying

240 nations' cumulative restrictions on speech onto every country across the board, NCUC's proposal is more narrowly tailored to limit only those words that are actually illegal where registered, it says.

"ICANN

needs to stick to its narrow, technical coordination role," says Milton Mueller, a professor at Syracuse University School of Information Studies and a NCUC executive committee member. "There has always been a danger that ICANN's exclusive control of Internet identifiers would be used as leverage to enforce extraneous policies. We need to protect the Internet from globalized, centralized regulation."

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NCUC says the GNSO proposal is "further flawed" because it's framed around an "irrelevant 1883 treaty on trademarks that is inappropriate, both because of its archaic origin and because trademark law is intrinsically a narrow legal paradigm that does not extend to a full vision of societal benefits and rights" and, "Most notably, trademark law is not designed to regulate non-commercial speech, which is vast majority of online communication."

The NCUC

says its proposal to amend Term of Reference 2 (v) is the main proposal in a group of five NCUC proposals to reform the policy recommendations in the February 13 GNSO draft report.

"It

is possible that ICANN's GNSO Policy Council will vote on draft final report as soon as the next ICANN board meeting in Lisbon in late March 2007," says the Blogger News Network story, adding:

"NCUC

urges individuals and organizations that are concerned with protecting free expression and innovation to contact ICANN Board Members and their national representative of the Government Advisory Committee (GAC) to express their out the current draft and support for NCUC's amendments.

"If

you live in the United States, your representative on the GAC is Suzanne Sene from the US Commerce Department. Suzanne Sene can be contacted via email to [SSene\[at\]ntia.doc.gov](mailto:SSene[at]ntia.doc.gov)."