
ICANN85 Mumbai | CF – Joint Meeting: ICANN Board and RSSAC
Monday, March 9, 2026 – 16:30 to 17:30 IST

FRANCO CARRASCO

Hello and welcome, everybody. My name is Franco Carrasco, and I am the participation manager for this session. Welcome to the joint session between the ICANN Board and the Root Server System Advisory Committee. Please note that this session is being recorded and follows the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior, the ICANN Community Anti-Harassment Policy, and the Community Participant Code of Conduct concerning statements of interest. Interpretation for this session will include English, French, and Spanish.

For our panelists today, we ask that you please state your name for the record and the language that you will speak if speaking a language other than English. Please also speak at a reasonable pace. This discussion today is between the ICANN Board and the RSSAC members only. Therefore, we will not be taking any questions from the audience. Having said that, I will now hand the floor over to the ICANN Board Chair, Tripti Sinha.

TRIPTI SINHA

Thank you, Franco. Welcome, everyone. This is our first bilateral meeting at ICANN 85 in Mumbai. As Franco just said, this is with the Board and the Root Server System Advisory Committee. These meetings are very important because we have an honest back and

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forth and talk about all kinds of issues that are pressing upon us. So with that, I am going to turn it over to Wes Hardaker, who will be facilitating the meeting. Wes?

WES HARDAKER

Thank you very much, Tripti. Good day, everybody. Good day, my friends. We will start with a quick around the table just for reference, especially to the audience. This is a working session. We often have a slightly more square table, so we are going to have to look sideways a lot. But let's start, Hiro. Can you start and introduce yourself and what operator you are with?

HIRO HOTTA

Hiro Hotta, RSSAC.

JAMES GALVIN

James Galvin, ICANN Board.

JOHN CRAIN

John Crain. In this situation, RSSAC.

KEVIN HILDEBRAND

Kevin Hildebrand, RSSAC, University of Maryland.

DAVID LAWRENCE

David Lawrence, IETF liaison to the Board.

KENNETH RENARD

Ken Renard, RSSAC, H-Root.

JEFF OSBORN

Jeff Osborn, RSSAC Chair, F-Root.

LARS-JOHAN LIMAN

Lars-Johan Liman, Netnod, RSSAC.

WES HARDAKER

And I am Wes Hardaker, the RSSAC liaison to the ICANN Board.

TRIPTI SINHA

Tripti Sinha, ICANN Board.

KURTIS LINDQVIST

And Kurtis Lindqvist, President and CEO, ICANN.

SAJID RAHMAN

Sajid Rahman, ICANN Board.

AMITABH SINGHAL

Amitabh Singhal, ICANN Board.

GREG DIBIASE

Greg DiBiase, ICANN Board.

PATRICIO POBLETE

Patricio Poblete, ICANN Board.

BYRON HOLLAND

Byron Holland, ICANN Board.

WES HARDAKER

All right, thank you very much. Do we have any RSSAC members online? There are some root server operators. Russ Mundy is online, who is the SSAC liaison to the RSSAC. Robert Carolina is online, who is a root server operator and part of RSSAC. I think that is it. If I look quickly and if I missed anybody, feel free to speak up and say so.

With that, this meeting will likely be a little bit short. The number of questions we have varies from session to session, but we speak on a regular basis. We have a couple of questions to the Board, and then the Board has a couple of questions to RSSAC. We will take the questions to the Board from RSSAC first, and I am going to read them together.

As we were thinking about the discussion that we could have today, one thing that maybe not everybody knows is that our new CEO, Kurtis Lindqvist, has been in place for a year and three months. He used to be a root server operator himself. From the root server operator and RSSAC perspective, we were curious how he finds his role in ICANN and how his past experience as a root server operator relates. Our questions to Kurtis and to the Board were: What does

the CEO and the Board think of the one-year service that has transpired so far? Specifically to Kurtis, what is your perspective on the state of the DNS root server system within ICANN from your perspective as a former root server operator? Tripti, are you going to start or is Kurtis going to start?

TRIPTI SINHA

Kurtis is second.

WES HARDAKER

Kurtis is going to start. Okay.

KURTIS LINDQVIST

Thank you. I am quite intrigued to hear what Tripti is going to say about my performance, but I am looking forward to this. I am still evaluating it and I will be taking notes.

The question is what I think about... when I joined ICANN, as was said, I had been a root server operator. I had been engaged in the ICANN community, so I did have quite a bit of insight into ICANN and what ICANN did and what it was. Perhaps it was not really much of a surprise as to what I took on. The good news is that the role was what I expected it to be. I am still here; I haven't run away.

I think I have brought, as everyone does who comes into this role, different perspectives, different focus, and different experiences. As I said in my speech today, one of the things I have focused on is the internal work. To some extent, of course, some of the events

around this have taken quite a bit of time. But I think largely we have done a lot of work on the internal part, on everything from HR processes to making sure we have aligned objectives that are aligned with our fiscal year, and that we have a line of sight and internal objectives from our strategy and operating plan. This helps staff to grow and develop ourselves internally.

I also think what I said this morning in the opening speech about increasing transparency around policy development and the status of policy is very important so that we can have an engagement with the community on where that policy work is, how we plan to implement this, and what the priorities are. That is something I brought and something I have cared a lot about: how do we work this? How do we structure this work in a way so it becomes more efficient, or at least more transparent regarding where we are?

The question is what I think about myself, and I am not sure I should score myself on that. I think I like myself. But if you look at the work I have done in the year and three months, what impact has it had on the community? I am going to take the question as that, even though that is not strictly what the question is. I am going to read it as that. But I do hope that the work we are doing on this is going to give the community a more transparent view of us and more input on the priorities, the workload, and how we shape and form the policy that ICANN is at the end of the day being judged on. How do we perform this role? How do we perform at the mission of ICANN?

I do think also that the work we are doing internally, while it sounds very internally focused, is my job. It is to make ICANN org able to scale better, to handle this work and work more efficiently, and deliver on this, but also work more cohesively and coherently as a team. That is sort of what I think I have brought, and hopefully, that will become visible over time in the efficiency of how we work and how we deliver the strategy and the mission for the community.

I often get the question: what do you want to do with ICANN? I find the question a little bit odd because ICANN's role is to deliver for the community. My job is to ensure that the org delivers on the ICANN mission and on the strategy as agreed by the community. My own views are actually secondary to all that. That is the purpose of ICANN. Thank you.

WES HARDAKER

All right. Thanks very much. Tripti?

TRIPTI SINHA

First, I would like to thank RSSAC for sending a very unusual question to the Board. The second half says, "What does the Board think of Kurtis's one-year service so far to ICANN?" I have never done a public assessment of an individual, so be prepared, Kurtis.

Let's put this in perspective. Kurtis was hired a year and three months ago, in December of 2024. Let's take a look at what the state of ICANN was at the time. We were just coming out of a somewhat complex financial situation. The next round was well

underway; it was an approved initiative and was in the middle of being planned. WSIS was in high gear. We were rallying around that particular effort and putting resources together to see how we would deal with that, and the community had come together as well.

We had a crisis on our hands with AFRINIC, so that was underway as well. We had some complex internal matters that Kurtis just alluded to. We also were eighty percent through making or planning our new strategic plan. Then he joins a company that has a Board of nineteen, including the CEO, making twenty, and he doesn't know the nineteen of us. That was the state of play. Was that somewhat complex, Kurtis?

KURTIS LINDQVIST

You never told me before I joined.

TRIPTI SINHA

Well, hardly any CEO knows all that when they join. Looking back, I think he has done an admirable job. As he has shared, the finances are in very good shape. He comes with a strong technical background, so I think he fully understood what was required to implement the next round and keep it on track. As you know, the initiative is going to be opened next month. WSIS, as you heard the outcome, was very successful. Thank you, Kurtis, for all the energy you put into that.

AFRINIC is now in a very good place and it is being healed back to good health. He has already talked about some internal matters that he has been looking into. The strategic plan was ratified last year and is currently a year into implementation. I think he knows his Board very well, and I must say there are moments when we share some good laughs together as well. He has got a sense of humor. I would say our new CEO is doing very well. So, RSSAC, are you happy?

WES HARDAKER

I think we are, and that dovetails into the second question which, Kurtis, you haven't quite fully answered yet. How much have your past experiences, both as a root server operator and for those that don't know, Tripti used to be a root server operator too, helped? Kurtis was also on the Internet Architecture Board for a while and was heavily involved in the IETF. You do have a strong technical background as Tripti just alluded to. I feel like I am interviewing you again, and that is not the intent. But I am curious as to how much that has helped your evolution into the role that you are in at the moment.

KURTIS LINDQVIST

I will share a very funny anecdote. When I came to Istanbul when I first joined, I kept meeting people from the ICANN community that I knew in the corridor. Some people would say, "Oh, the root servers got someone representing them now." The people from RIPE and the RIR community said, "The RIR community got

someone representing them now." Then the IAB and the IETF came and said, "We have someone representing us now." I started feeling slightly schizophrenic towards the end of that week. It is very kind of people to say that, but I do have a very varied background. I have been active in all these communities.

When it comes to the perspective on the root server system, I might say something that was controversial a long time ago. I joined Netnod back in 2002 when they were a root server operator. Something we need to remind ourselves, and I think RSSAC has tried to do this, is that the root server system hasn't actually been a static thing. It has evolved since 2002. We can talk about when we introduced Anycast, but also the models and operating architectures that the root servers use have been an evolution in that time. The root server operators as a group and the RSSAC have also evolved.

In terms of cooperation—and this is the controversial part—it was probably always there, but I think that we have much stronger coordination today. If I would have said this in 2002, that would have been a horrendous thing to say, that we were coordinated. Today there is a level of coordination, and I don't think that is a bad thing. I think that is actually part of the evolution. All of this together has helped the root server system and the root server operators to be the phenomenally robust and resilient system it is. We don't actually give it enough credit that it does, as a system,

have a hundred percent uptime. It is a phenomenally robust system.

That has been very important. ICANN as an org plays one part of this in the security and stability of this. Everybody contributed to decreasing the global footprint. That is another thing that has changed phenomenally in the twenty-five years since I joined Netnod: we have had this much broader sense of this. We also have a much more studied and understood system. Something we also don't often give the root servers credit for is that a lot of work around this gave us much more systemic insight into how the system works and partly helped us make some of the decisions in making it more stable by looking at the data.

Regarding the political debate, one thing we should keep in mind is that back in 2005, we had the WSIS in Tunis. Before that, the PrepCom meetings started in 2001 or 2002. A lot of those discussions were about the belief that root servers control the Internet and that Internet traffic went through the root servers. That was a myth that we managed to dispel. We worked together with the technical community to explain what the root servers are. We collected and provided the data and analysis to show what this system does and how it affects the system. We have proven that it isn't as magic as people thought it was, but it is phenomenally robust, and I think that is a very valuable part of what came out of this.

This has really helped the work with the various regions in deploying Anycast instances and root servers. It helped people be more trustworthy of the system, and it has also brought a lot of performance and stability to the global Internet. That is thanks to the root server operators. We can show that by the data I talked about, and I think that has been really helpful to the entire group. I think the root server system has gone through events where that coordination has been crucial. They have pulled together. We have shared incidents. We have worked on incident responses and created a very mature system. I hope you guys haven't done anything less than that since I left Netnod.

Having that robust coordination and cooperation about how this works is very positive. It is a system that is in really good health. The question now is what is going to come after this because there are a lot of discussions about other ways we could distribute root servers to complement the current model to make it even more robust. To me, that is just a continuation of that discussion. It has always been ongoing. Although I have only been a root server operator for twenty-four years since I became one, some of you have done it for almost twice that time. That experience is quite useful and shows that we have continuity and insight.

WES HARDAKER

I think that was a very thorough answer. Thank you very much. Are there any Board members or RSSAC members that want to continue grilling Kurtis, or are we done and want to turn to

questions to RSSAC from the Board? I see no more hands, so let's go ahead and go on to the next slide. Thank you very much.

These are the ICANN Board questions to RSSAC. The first question is: The ICANN five-year FY26 to '30 strategic plan highlights and prioritizes the support for the vision for ICANN for 2030. The annual strategic review program is launching at ICANN 85, and this program provides a structured way to assess whether updates to the FY26-30 strategic plan are needed to reflect changes in the external environment and ICANN's internal capability. From your perspective, what is the top emerging trend that may impact ICANN that you think the Board should consider? I believe, Jeff, you are going to answer this question on behalf of RSSAC. Thank you.

JEFF OSBORN

Thank you, Wes. That is a lot of words, but what it really comes down to is: what is the top emerging trend that may impact ICANN that you think the Board should consider?

My background is in technology, and the one thing we do is plan, and then the second thing we do is tear up the plan the next day because events changed. So when I look at five-year plans, I immediately say, "Oh my God, what's the first iceberg we're going to run into?" Since I run a software company, for me, it is AI. It is unimaginable that any of us has a good idea of how AI will affect ICANN over the next five years, next week, or the week after. The primary thing is that I don't know what to say to do about it, but obviously this is something that is going to change how everybody

does things in ways we really can't imagine, and we need to imagine it. I have got to say AI. It is really the only contender for the thing out there to be worried about.

WES HARDAKER

I think that is an excellent point. I will say that the Board definitely has that on our mind as well. We have discussed it. Tripti, please?

TRIPTI SINHA

Yes, the Board is talking about it, but I have a question for you. Is the RSSAC putting together a study group or a work group to see how it could potentially impact the root service system and its growth?

JEFF OSBORN

The short answer is no, we haven't. It is probably a good idea. I am spending a huge amount of time with it at work figuring out software development; it is much more compelling. We have been in a time when there is a parallel with a lot of the same people who are in RSSAC who are working on governance. Specifically, I had been trying to keep our workload a little light because that was really consuming a lot of the oxygen. But as we come off of that, it's a really good idea. The obvious things are increasingly sophisticated attacks. And who knows how and what? Your expertise in the scary areas of PQC and how the world all gets scary one day—AI is all stuff we are smart enough to know to be scared of, but I don't know if we are smart enough to figure it out yet.

WES HARDAKER

Jim?

JAMES GALVIN

Thank you. Let me expand a little bit on AI and draw attention to the discussion this morning, the plenary session on resiliency. For those who were there, there was quite some discussion of the different elements of resiliency that we need to be paying attention to. One of the things that struck me—and I think it's actually partly solved by the root server system as it is today—is this notion of the complexity of dependencies; things that we don't know what we don't know and we don't think about.

There were some examples highlighted at the time about how a little thing over here goes down, and it's amazing how it has cascading failures and causes things to happen. The root server system is kind of unique and Kurtis was quick to point out it's been a hundred percent uptime and quite robust and running for decades with no issues. In many ways, it is partly a solution to that complexity of dependencies because you have twelve different organizations, twelve different architectures, and twelve different enterprises going on.

I am wondering if this is something which RSSAC or any other root server operators have any point of view about. If you've had some time to think about this issue, do you call this out for yourselves? Do you do an inventory to confirm your potential internal

dependencies as well as your dependencies between each other that may or may not exist? Any thoughts about the complexity of dependencies? Thanks.

WES HARDAKER

Liman.

LARS-JOHAN LIMAN

Thanks. Lars-Johan Liman from Netnod here. I can only speak for Netnod, but in our case, we definitely do such internal reviews and look at dependencies. That is part of the operation of an organization that wants to have credibility on the larger scale. We also have customer requirements because we operate commercial services in parallel that we wouldn't be able to fulfill if we didn't have these things in place properly.

It is definitely happening. It is also happening not only within RSSAC but also between the root server operators outside the ICANN community, for instance, in the root server operators meetings which happen three times per year and the work in between these meetings. Whether it is enough or the right way, we can always discuss and we are happy to take input on that, but it is definitely there.

I would like to point out another thing as well. When you start to look at the system and balance that to see what impact AI might have on it, the root servers are only a very small piece of the larger DNS system. You cannot really undertake such an investigation in

the local context of the root servers only. You have to do it in the wider scope of the entire DNS system and cooperate with other people, DNS experts around the world, and AI people. The root server operators are out there participating in these technical fora where these things are discussed. I would argue it is going on. We don't have a specific group within RSSAC to deal with it, but the work is going on in other venues. Thanks.

WES HARDAKER

I will add a little bit to that. We have always looked between each other for who is using what pieces of hardware or software to make sure that we have a lot of redundancy or different types of implementations, ensuring we are not critically dependent on one piece of software that everybody might be using.

Only a year ago or so, we actually published a list publicly that gives an idea of the breadth of different types of technologies that we use, everything from routing software to authoritative service software to various things. We don't list everything, but we do list operating systems and some high-level points, specifically to let the community know that we have done the due diligence that you are asking about. Besides internal to each team, we have done cross-team reviews and are beginning to publish some of that information as well. Ken.

KENNETH RENARD

Ken Renard. One take on this that was sparked by an idea from the newcomers' question was the impact of AI on some third party. If AI were to cause a disruption in some economy, how would that affect the root server system? The likely effects are things that we have seen over and over again already: misconfigured systems that just start blasting root servers with really weird queries. We have been there and we do this every day. I don't see that as a threat, but that is just a different perspective of how it could affect things.

WES HARDAKER

All right. With that, David?

DAVID LAWRENCE

I was going to point out that AI, while it is understandable and completely justifiable that we look at it through the lens of potential risk, is also an opportunity. One of the things I wanted to mention during this meeting was the kudos that belong to the RSSAC and the RSSAC caucus for the amount of work product they do, supported by the very capable ICANN staff and a number of technical volunteers from the community who give freely of their time to produce high-quality documents researching the state of the root server system.

The volunteer nature of a lot of the work that happens there takes a fair bit of time to produce these documents. AI has demonstrated at times that it can be quite good at identifying complex interdependencies and different aspects of complicated systems in

a much more efficient way than it can take people to analyze. At the same time that there is risk with AI's emerging technology, there are also the benefits that it does provide that I think will continue to support the research and product of the RSSAC organization.

WES HARDAKER

All right. Thanks. I will close this question with one corollary story that I think you will all find amusing. A while ago, somebody asked me, "Why is a university operating a root server?" We have always had an answer for that. We are trying to help promote DNS and do things in interesting ways and promote research.

I decided to ask an AI agent, "Should a university be running a root server?" The answer I got back was humorous in two contexts. One, it said that a university plays an important element in diversity, which is something that RSSAC has espoused for a long time. You need corporations, you need universities, and you need all these different things. There is not much documentation on the Internet that talks about this, and it was like reading an RSSAC document because that is what AI systems do. They ingest information, and the only information it had was the documents that the people at this table wrote. So that is what it was regurgitating.

Then it proceeded to list all of the root server operators, including ones that didn't exist. It listed a university in Finland that has never been a root server operator. That is unfortunately what AI was like. Now, this was six months ago. To go back to Jeff's original point of

things changing so quickly, I suspect if I asked today, it probably wouldn't get as many wrong answers.

JEFF OSBORN

I want to speak to Dave's point because I think the opportunities of AI are manyfold. It's just they don't keep us up at night. It's the risks that keep us up at night. I was answering the question rather than besmirching the use of AI at all, just to be clear.

WES HARDAKER

All right. Thank you. Let's go on to the last question, which is: How is your group participating in the Review of Reviews Cross Community Group, and what are your thoughts on how the proposals to date are evolving reviews to be more fit for purpose and sustainable? In particular, would you share your views with respective roles of self-assessment, as in the Continuous Improvement Program, and the contemplated assessment of SOs and ACs by the broader community in the context of the reviews program? I think, Ken, you are going to answer for RSSAC.

KENNETH RENARD

As you are reading that, I see this is not fair because that is three questions and Jeff only gave me one. As far as the Review of Reviews, Jeff and I are participating in the CCG. It is a big effort and it is fast-paced. We feel very much out of place and well over our heads on the topic, but there are some amazing people that are putting a lot of time and effort into this.

What I take out of it is that these reviews are very important. Usually, RSSAC stays on the side and keeps to itself, but this is something that we believe is really important. We really do need to do our civic duty and participate not only in this effort but in the resulting reviews. I won't speak for all of RSSAC, but my recommendation would be to commit to participating in the resulting reviews.

The proposals to date promote the efficiency of reviews and making them effective. When we hear of reviews, we often cringe, but these are very important. I see the CIP, the Continuous Improvement Program, as an improvement over some of the previous reviews. It is not as intrusive or necessarily as time-consuming, and we actually have a pretty good head start on this as RSSAC based on the good work of Naveed and Aram. I think we are going to be hitting the ground running with this pretty soon.

The structural reviews in the broader context of ICANN resulted in the RSSAC caucus, which I think is a very good thing. We look forward to that in light of the evolution of the RSSAC over the next couple of years. The structural reviews will provide helpful external input on how we are doing. Again, we have this commitment that we need to participate in these reviews, be members of these cross-community work groups, and do our civic duty.

WES HARDAKER

Thanks. All right. Thanks, Ken. Does any Board member... Sajid? No? Okay. Any Board member or RSSAC member want to follow on with additional concepts? Jim, please.

JAMES GALVIN

James Galvin. I am one of the two Board liaisons to the CCG. León Sánchez is the other one. I just want to thank you. You used the phrase civic duty, and I think civic duty is an important concept in all of this. The reviews are interesting because on a practical level, I think most people are supportive of the concept.

But one of the open questions when it comes to civic duty is that we also have to accept that there might be recommendations out of reviews that people don't like, and we have to figure out how to deal with them. That is an open question yet in the review group. I like your phrase of civic duty because at some level, we all implicitly at a minimum, and explicitly at best, sign up for certain expectations and responsibilities.

We have to figure out how to manage that. That is a real difference from before because one of the open questions is that you get recommendations you don't like and you ignore them. We can't really let that happen. Thank you for acknowledging the commitment and paying attention. I look forward to your continued advocacy in the group. This is a really important topic for the Board too, and we appreciate the community members who are committed to it. Thanks.

WES HARDAKER

Okay. Thank you, James. Anybody else with comments or questions? Seeing none, I think we will probably give you back some time. I will close with one thought, Kurtis. I noticed that your questions to RSSAC had the word review in it, and that's probably what triggered our review of your performance in the past year. Be careful what you ask, I guess, because it triggers...

KENNETH RENARD

You need to change your prompts.

WES HARDAKER

All right. So with that, thank you, everybody. Tripti, I will give it back to you to close us out.

TRIPTI SINHA

Well, thank you very much, Wes, for facilitating, and thank you RSSAC for all the work you do and the advice you produce for the Board. We look forward to continued discussions. Have a great meeting. Thank you. This meeting is adjourned.

KENNETH RENARD

Thank you.

WES HARDAKER

Thank you all.

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