**New gTLD Program
Explanatory Memorandum**

**IDN Variant TLDs in the new gTLD Program**

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# Background — New gTLD Program

Since ICANN was founded in 1998 as a not-for-profit, multi-stakeholder organization dedicated to coordinating the Internet's addressing system, one of its foundational principles, recognized by the United States and other governments, has been to promote competition in the domain-name marketplace while ensuring Internet security and stability. The expansion of the generic top-level domains (gTLDs) will allow for more innovation, choice and change to the Internet's addressing system, now represented by 22 gTLDs.

The decision to introduce new gTLDs followed a detailed and lengthy consultation process with all constituencies of the global Internet community represented by a wide variety of stakeholders – governments, individuals, civil society, business and intellectual property constituencies, and the technology community. Instrumental to this process were ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC), At-Large Advisory Committee (ALAC), Country Code Names Supporting Organization (ccNSO), and Security and Stability Advisory Committee (SSAC). The consultation process resulted in a policy on the introduction of New gTLDs completed by the Generic Names Supporting Organization (GNSO) in 2007, and adopted by ICANN's Board in June 2008.

This explanatory memorandum is part of a series of documents published by ICANN to assist the global Internet community in understanding the requirements and processes presented in the Applicant Guidebook, currently in draft form. Since late 2008, ICANN staff has been sharing the program development progress with the Internet community through a series of public comment fora on the applicant guidebook drafts and supporting documents. To date, there have been over 250 consultation days on critical program materials. The comments received continue to be carefully evaluated and used to further refine the program and inform development of the final version of the Applicant Guidebook.

For current information, timelines and activities related to the New gTLD Program, please go to http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtld-program.htm.

Please note that this is a discussion draft only. Potential applicants should not rely on any of the proposed details of the new gTLD program as the program remains subject to further consultation and revision.

## Summary of Key Points in this Paper

- In 25 September 2010, the ICANN Board decided that no IDN variant gTLDs will be delegated through the New gTLD Program until appropriate variant management solutions are developed.

- The IDN Variant TLDs Issues Project is underway and is expected to provide further information towards a determination of the feasibility of the introduction of IDN variant gTLDs.

## IDN Variant TLDs in the new gTLD Program

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a clear rationale as to why ICANN has adopted the current approach on variant TLDs in the New gTLD Guidebook. That is, the memorandum seeks to provide a review of the current restrictions on the delegation of variant TLDs, the reasons for adopting this temporary approach, and a roadmap to a mechanism that will enable delegation of variant TLDs. This explanation of the current approach will serve as the baseline for the Variant TLD Management Project case study teams as they work toward creating a successful mechanism for delegating variants.

The ICANN Board in its 2010 meeting in Norway decided[1] that

> *No changes will be made to the next version of the Applicant Guidebook with respect to the handling of gTLDs containing variant characters i.e. no variants of gTLDs will be delegated through the New gTLD Program until appropriate variant management solutions are developed.*

This decision was based on the determination that the handling of gTLDs containing IDN variants required significant further analysis and community consultation, and is in line with earlier decisions taken by the ICANN Board at the ICANN Nairobi public meeting[2] and recommendations from the IDN implementation team[3]. The decision also took account of the conservative position on variant management taken in the IDN ccTLD fast track implementation plan[4], and the decisions made by the Board in the IDN ccTLD fast track for CNNIC and TWNIC. The rationale for the Board's decision is documented in the Board briefing papers for the Norway meeting[5] and summarized in Appendix 1.

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[1] ICANN Board of Directors. (2010) Adopted Board Resolutions. Trondheim, Norway. http://www.icann.org/en/minutes/resolutions-25sep10-en.htm#2.5 (Appendix 2)
[2] ICANN Board of Directors. (2010) Adopted Board Resolutions. Nairobi, Kenya. http://www.icann.org/en/minutes/resolutions-12mar10-en.htm#10 (Appendix 3)
[3] IDN implementation team final report. http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtlds/idn-implementation-working-team-report-final-03dec09-en.pdf.
[4] Proposed Final Implementation Plan for the IDN ccTLD Fast Track Process. http://www.icann.org/en/announcements/announcement-2-30sep09-en.htm
[5] 2010.09.24-006 of Board Briefing Materials (2009). http://www.icann.org/en/minutes/board-briefing-materials-3-25sep10-en.pdf

The ICANN Board in its 2010 meeting in Norway directed the ICANN CEO to develop an issues report identifying what needs to be done with the evaluation, possible delegation, allocation and operation of IDN gTLDs containing variant characters, as part of the new gTLD process in order to facilitate the development of workable approaches to the deployment of gTLDs containing variant characters IDNs[1].

The ICANN CEO has established, after public consultation, the IDN Variant TLDs Issues Project to undertake this work[6] and this is now underway with the first meetings of the project Case Study teams planned for the ICANN Singapore public meeting. The conclusion of this work is expected to provide further information towards a determination of the feasibility of the introduction of new gTLD IDN variants.

Importantly, significant work has been completed with the initiation of the IDN Variant Management Project Team. The results of the work done to date will be published under separate cover prior to the ICANN international meeting in Singapore.

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[6] Final Proposal for the IDN Variant TLDs Issues Project. http://www.icann.org/en/topics/new-gtlds/idn-variant-tlds-delegation-20apr11-en.pdf

## Appendix 1. Norway Board Meeting Decision Rationale

The rationale for the Board's decision is documented in the Board briefing papers for the Norway meeting[7].

In summary:

- *While exceptions have been made for CNNIC and TWNIC, these were supported by the significant expertise of both these registry operators in this area – there is no guarantee that gTLD applicants hold the same expertise.*

- *There is a fundamental difference in the environments and considerations between the ccTLD and gTLD spaces in considering whether a variant should be delegated. For example, the delegation of ccTLDs is restricted to country and territory names.*

- *Another factor that may be considered, but is not dispositive, is that the Chinese language variants are not visually similar, differentiating them from many variants that might be requested.*

- *The experiences gained with these exceptions have yet not been reviewed or discussed in the community. These implementations were intended to serve as a case-study for the global variant TLD management requirements. More time is necessary to conduct such studies, but indications are that the variant TLDs, such as the Chinese, are functioning adequately with the registry manager having appropriate registration rules in place, and running the variant TLD zones in a coordinated effort.*

- *Developing sets of effective and enforceable controls to ensure a good user experience is difficult, especially without the learning of the first variant delegations. Allowing for delegation of new gTLD variants without knowledge of possible outcomes and without additional protections in place increases the vulnerabilities to users and the risks to ICANN.*

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[7] See 2010.09.24-006 of Board Briefing Materials (2009). http://www.icann.org/en/minutes/board-briefing-materials-3-25sep10-en.pdf

## Appendix 2. ICANN Board of Directors. (2010) Adopted Board Resolutions. Trondheim, Norway.

### *2.5 Variant Management*

*No changes will be made to the next version of the Applicant Guidebook with respect to the handling of gTLDs containing variant characters. I.e., no variants of gTLDs will be delegated through the New gTLD Program until appropriate variant management solutions are developed.*

*The recent delegation of Chinese-language ccTLDs does not yet provide a generally workable approach for gTLDs; there are serious limits to extending this approach at this time. ICANN will coordinate efforts to develop long-term policy and technical development work on these issues.*

*The Board notes that the following scenarios are possible while evaluating variant gTLD strings:*

1. *Applicant submits a gTLD string and indicates variants to this string. The applicant, if successful, will get the primary string. The indicated variant strings are noted for future reference, and these variant strings will not be delegated to the applicant; the applicant has no rights or claim to those strings. ICANN may independently determine which strings are variants of each other, and will not necessarily acknowledge that the applicant's list of purported variants be treated as variants under the process.*

2. *Multiple applicants apply for strings that are variants of each other. They will be in contention.*

3. *Applicant submits a request for a string and does not indicate that there are variants. ICANN will not identify variant strings unless scenario 2 above occurs.*

*The CEO is directed to develop (in consultation with the board ES-WG) an issues report identifying what needs to be done with the evaluation, possible delegation, allocation and operation of gTLDs containing variant characters IDNs as part of the new gTLD process in order to facilitate the development of workable approaches to the deployment of gTLDs containing variant characters IDNs. The analysis of needed work should identify the appropriate venues (e.g., ICANN, IETF, language community, etc.) for pursuing the necessary work. The report should be published for public review.*

*The CEO is directed to produce for the board by the next Board meeting (28 October 2010):*

1. *A Work plan for developing the issues report.*

2. *An identification of the skills and capabilities needed by ICANN to complete the issues report and further develop ICANN's organizational ability to continue the strategic rollout of IDN TLDs.*

## Appendix 3. ICANN Board of Directors. (2010) Adopted Board Resolutions. Nairobi, Kenya.

http://www.icann.org/en/minutes/resolutions-12mar10-en.htm#10

### 10. IDN Variants

*Whereas, language communities that use variant characters are affected by the management and implementation of variants in new TLDs;*

*Whereas, an independent IDN Implementation Support Team was formed as a result of discussions at the ICANN meeting in Sydney, Australia, to make recommendations for managing IDN variants at the top level;*

*Whereas, the IDN Implementation Support Team has completed its work and published its recommendations in a report for public comment and recommends that ICANN is to study the usability of the DNAME resource record as part of a supported mechanism for managing TLD strings containing variants;*

*Whereas the variant approach used in the IDN ccTLD Fast Track is consistent with the Team's recommendations;*

*Whereas a model for implementing the recommendations of the IDN Implementation Support Team for allocation/reservation of desired variant TLDs, pending identification of a mechanism for delegation and management of the variant TLDs in the New gTLD Program, has been posted for public comment.*

*Resolved (2010.03.12.28), ICANN shall take into account remaining public comments on the proposed model and based on such comments develop a proposal to be included in version 4 of the Draft Applicant Guidebook;.*

*Resolved (2010.03.12.29), the Board tasks the ICANN CEO to undertake a study on the usability of the DNAME resource record as a part of a supported mechanism for managing TLD strings containing variants.*

*Resolved (2010.03.12.30), ICANN thanks those members of the community who have devoted their time and energy to the work on these issues, and urges the community to collaborate on the ongoing testing of variant mechanisms.*