

To Mr Cherine Chalaby, Chair, ICANN

Dear Cherine,

The geoTLD.group represents the interests of 36 geographic TLDs identifying a city, region, language or culture. Our members include government entities, companies and associations.

After four years of operations for our early adopters such as .berlin, geoTLDs today represent a range of TLDs, going from the larger .tokyo, .london, .nyc registries, to more brand-like models such as .stockholm.

Each geoTLD has cultivated an ethos of service to its community, prioritizing actual usage and local presence on and offline, and zero-tolerance of abuse, over short-term financial imperatives. These were the commitments the geoTLDs made in their applications to ICANN and towards the relevant government(s), and they will continue to be fulfilled as each registry serves its community and the public interest.

geoTLDs are growing organically and steadily, each at its own pace. While every TLD is a work in progress, many of our members have already reached sustainable levels, securing their operations and their users' future.

Critics of the New gTLD program complain about low public uptake of domain names, issues of abuse and lack of trust - particularly with regards to intellectual property rights protection - and a general commoditization of the domain industry.

The geoTLDs are proof that these criticisms are not an accurate portrayal of the new gTLD program as a whole. geoTLDs in cities and regions are highly visible in the public space, with local businesses and brands finding meaningful, usable and trusted names, and larger entities identifying with their local markets. In some areas, these names have taken such an integral part of the local identity that even local government is using the geoTLD for some or even all its online presence. We have achieved this without under-valuing ourselves or our local ccTLDs, who are often partners in our endeavours.

Since the inception, some of us dating back from the start of ccTLDs, we are active participants in the ICANN community. We constructively work with tools and processes to advance our cause, in a spirit of openness and cooperation with other stakeholders. We contribute not just to geoTLD or New gTLD issues, but policy issues of relevance to ICANN as a whole.

We are, for example, very proud of our role in raising awareness and suggesting solutions on GDPR since early 2016. We are actively participating in

relevant PDPs and also with the GAC and ccNSO, and engaging our peers to ensure our views are understood and our common interests can find alignment.

Since the close of the first New gTLD Round in 2012, we have been in constant touch with potential future geoTLDs: those who had not been reached by ICANN's public outreach campaign ahead of the first round, and those keen on seeing results before deciding to participate. They are now eager to get started building public-spirited TLDs to serve their own communities and its public interest. But six years on we still cannot give them clarity on when they, too, will be able to raise their local flag on the Internet.

Today, with deadlines to open a new round sliding, and some in the ICANN community even questioning the very concept of geoTLDs, our credibility as early adopters and thought-leaders is being eroded. It is increasingly difficult to sustain future applicants' interest and enthusiasm.

With the ICANN Organisation taking an understandable but nonetheless damaging backseat on the relevant PDPs, and budgets omitting to allocate much-needed resources to prepare a new round our position - internally and externally - is being eroded from inside our community.

We invite you, Cherine, and the ICANN Board and the community at large, to visit us in our cities and regions to get a feel and see the impact of the New gTLD program locally.

We welcome the scrutiny of doubters, we have the evidence for how this program is working and delivering the local benefits and community value our members committed to, in their applications.

We need your leadership to reaffirm geoTLDs being solid assets in the New gTLD program, and to signal clear intent to see that the New gTLD program is here to stay and will soon reopen its doors. We, geoTLDs, feel strongly that we have fulfilled our side of the bargain, delivering on our commitments to the public good; now ICANN needs to deliver on its commitments, to facilitate new iterations of this program.

Sebastien Ducos
Chair of the geoTLD.group

