The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was recently held in Bali, and IIC Singapore along with TRPC and Olswang Asia jointly organized a Post-IGF Bali Breakfast Briefing (see http://trpc.biz/iic-singapore-forum-igf-bali-breakfast-briefing/) on Monday 28 Oct 2013 hosted by Olswang Asia at their offices in the Ocean Financial Centre. To a well attended audience, four speakers gave their perspectives on the IGF process and in a session chaired by Lim May-Ann, TRPC Research Director.

Lim May-Ann (Internet Society IGF 2013 Ambassador) opened the session with an introduction to the IGF. Described as a neutral meeting space which embodies the quintessential borderless nature of Internet, the IGF was established at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) 2006. Although it has no decision-making power, its UN mandate gives it recognition as a think tank and open forum which helps identify issues for decisions in other fora. As it celebrates its 8th year of establishment, the IGF continues to grow in global participation.

For ICANN, Sally Costerton (Senior Advisor to the President – Global Stakeholder Engagement) explained that the IGF process as a grass-roots gathering of many different organizations and individuals with a common interest in maintaining an open Internet multi-stakeholder approach to governance. ICANN’s involvement stems from its unique role of assigning names and numbers, and to be effective ICANN needs to engage openly and transparently with all interested parties. The Internet has grown from small beginnings when a few committed individuals took on the tasks of assignment and establishing route servers to aid the efficient international transmission of Internet traffic, and now ICANN is preparing the way to move to the next level. There are challenges ahead, from issues such as cyber-security to online child pornography, and it is therefore especially important that the multi-stakeholder approach achieves and maintains a cohesiveness to tackle these issues while keeping the Internet open.

Paul Mitchell (General Manager – Technology Policy Group, Microsoft) explained that the IGF was not a policy-making body, issued no recommendations or edicts, held nobody accountable and is, in many ways, a rather amorphous body. Yet it is important for businesses such as Microsoft to get involved with the discussion because of the need to defend the openness of the Internet. This is particularly important since the highly divisive WCIT-12 and the danger that at the upcoming ITU Plenipotentiary in 2014 some states may push for extending the reach of the ITU into Internet governance, a major step towards replacing, or compromising, a multi-stakeholder approach with a multilateral approach. The terminology is significant and is a clue to the direction in which different stakeholders wish to take the Internet.

Professor Ang Peng Hwa (Vice-President of the Internet Society (Singapore Chapter); Director of the Singapore Internet Research Centre; Professor of Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information at Nanyang Technological University (NTU)) elaborated on the outcome of Bali but also the outcome of the ICANN-Brazil agreement for Brazil to host a meeting on Internet governance in April 2103 (see http://www.news24.com/Technology/News/Brazil-to-host-internet-governance-summit-20131010 ) The event is currently being dubbed a “non-summit” meeting to emphasise its informal character. It follows upon the meeting on 7 October in Uruguay when leading organizations responsible globally for the technical operation of the Internet issued the Montevideo Statement on the Future of Internet Cooperation (see http://www.icann.org/en/news/announcements/announcement-07oct13-en.htm)

In 2014 it would seem that the ICANN-supported forums on Internet governance look like running as a parallel track to those sponsored by the ITU leading up to the ITU Plenipotentiary. This breakfast meeting very successfully brought out the core issues of the ‘conversation’ going forward. But it takes two to talk.