

10 Years of LACNIC: Internet and Human Values

by Raúl Echeberría

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. Thank you for being here with us on this very special day.

I will divide my speech into three parts:

- First, I will present a brief summary of the ten years of our organization;
- Then, I will say a few words about the current global context in relation to the Internet and LACNIC's position;
- To conclude, I will comment briefly on what I consider to be the main challenges ahead.

PART I: 10 Years of LACNIC

To talk about the history of LACNIC we must go back in time to 1990, when the region's Internet pioneers – several of whom are here with us today– created the Latin American Network Forum, an initiative that would ultimately prove critical to the growth of the Internet in the region, an organization created with the aim of sharing experiences and knowledge and generating the critical mass needed at that time.

Later, in 1996-97, while working from the Latin American Network Forum, these same leaders envisioned an opportunity in the decentralization of IP address administration. They realized that creating an organization to manage IP addresses in Latin America and Caribbean would also serve as a catalyst for the growth of the Internet in the region. This shows that from the earliest stages of what would become LACNIC, **from its very genetic constitution, a vision of development and growth by and for the region had already been outlined.**

The following two years were full of hard work, different models were analyzed, alliances were created, and as many regional Internet-related organizations as possible were involved. Finally, in August 1999, six organizations agreed to convince the world of the need for a Latin American and Caribbean registry organized and managed from within the region. On that date, within the framework of the ICANN meeting held in Santiago, Chile, an agreement to establish LACNIC was signed between AHCNET, CABASE, ECOMLAC, the Latin American Network Forum (ENRED), NIC Brazil and NIC Mexico, in which we committed ourselves to working on building the new organization.

I began this speech speaking about things that happened before the birth of LACNIC, as every beginning involves a critical germination phase and it is important to keep this in mind. Many people helped "give birth," many took a chance on us when **we had no certainty of success, but instead the conviction that we**

should dare to try, many devoted countless hours of their lives to the creation of LACNIC. Many travelled the world transmitting the required image of solidity when this was more of a desire than an actual fact. I want to thank each and every one of them. This anniversary is essentially a celebration of the efforts of all those who were part of the journey towards the realization of this dream.

Thus we arrive at October 31, 2002, the day on which LACNIC was officially born. Many anecdotes come to mind from that time. A particularly telling one is what happened that day in Shanghai when, after ICANN approved the official recognition of LACNIC, we decided to invite 30 people to the hotel bar to celebrate our success. To do so, we had to calculate roughly how much money we had between us. Our invitation was so successful that more than 100 people came and, when the time came to pay, we had to secretly calculate how much each of us had to pay out of our own pockets, magically combining cash and credit card payments. During those early days there were several occasions on which we tried to convey the image of an organization with greater capacity than we actually had. Yet we were indeed a group with great enthusiasm and a deep conviction.

We hardly had time to celebrate. The feeling of a mission accomplished, of having convinced the world of the need to have a Registry for Latin America and the Caribbean managed by the region itself, quickly became **a challenge in that everything that had already been done was just the beginning of everything that still needed to be done.**

I would like to quickly present some data from these first 10 years of LACNIC:

- LACNIC went from 143 members in 2002 to its 2640 current members.
- LACNIC started with a budget of U\$S 151,400 and now has U\$S 4,700,000.
- In 2002 we had 4 employees, today we have 36.
- When we started, only 8% of Latin Americans had Internet access, today Internet penetration in the region is 40% and is expected to reach 60% in the next three years.

These numbers –and please allow me to say this once again– show that our original intuitions were correct, and that these 10 years of LACNIC have been a time of growth and sustained, constant development.

It is clear that many people, many organizations, and many government agencies have played an active role in the growth and development of the Internet in our region. It is also clear that LACNIC has made a significant, steady contribution to make the regional situation what it is today.

PART II: LACNIC within the Global Context

LACNIC's 10th birthday finds a global context marked by three major events. Next week, the Internet Governance Forum will meet in Azerbaijan. And, in the coming weeks, two key meetings of the International Telecommunication Union will be held in Dubai where vital issues related to telecommunications around the world will be discussed. It is a happy coincidence that LACNIC's 10th anniversary celebrations coincide with these other events that will mark some of the current trends of the global Internet, as it is a good opportunity to collectively review the value of the collaborative work that all the actors involved with the Internet have carried out in our region, which can be observed in the work surrounding LACNIC and its impact.

These meetings we have mentioned will discuss, among other topics, issues related to Internet security and stability, cybercrime, child pornography, fraud. Some countries are attempting to solve these problems by introducing controls that may restrict the free exercise of human rights, particularly the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy. The problems these countries raise are real and show how important the Internet is today in the lives of people and society. These concerns are genuine and, in many cases, the proposals are well-intentioned. However, they propose a false dichotomy according to which meeting the challenges of today's Internet is only possible if certain rights are severed.

We believe that this view is mistaken. Our focus at LACNIC is that problems must be solved while promoting human rights, not confronting them. Technology platforms offer an opportunity for furthering freedom that should be encouraged, and technological issues should be addressed for freedom, not against it.

Far from having to improve one of the terms of the equation at the expense of the other, the real challenge is to improve Internet safety while at the same time improving the online exercise of human rights.

This year there have also been discussions in several countries on proposed legislation and regulations to protect intellectual property rights, such as PIPA, SOPA, or ACTA, among others. Placing the commercial rights associated with intellectual property protection on the same level as the right to freedom of expression would mean a potential setback for humanity and for the Internet.

Collaborative, interactive and coordinated experiences are the way to strengthen human rights and address the Internet's challenges. Nations may have local problems; however, Internet problems are no longer local and should therefore be approached from a global perspective, working together, always having human rights as an inalienable basis, without anyone expecting or assuming control.

The current Internet governance system's lack of centralized powers and distribution of functions, the transparency, openness, participation opportunities and accountability of the organizations and mechanisms currently involved in Internet governance, and, finally, the multistakeholder model, which engages all interested parties, are essential for supporting these collaborative experiences that will remain at the heart of the Internet's success. These are clearly aspects of Internet governance that we must cherish and preserve.

LACNIC promotes an Internet at the service of social, economic and human development.

We have spent many years working on adapting the Internet to society, now the challenge is to adapt society to the Internet.

The Internet has changed the way we do business, it has changed our teaching methods, how society interacts, and, in the near future, it will also have a huge impact on government systems.

Society must now learn to live in this new era, leveraging the advantages of technology in all human activities, and this poses challenges that must be faced. **In this context, LACNIC's challenge is to remain current, to continue to be of use in an ever changing world, but without losing its values.**

Research is one of the tools that we established during the past 10 years to address these challenges. **Organizations such as ours must innovate and act, but they also need to reflect and understand.**

The FRIDA program supported **numerous** projects by young researchers from countries across the region. The initiative invested more than 1.5 million dollars for this purpose. The experience was enriching not only for researchers, but for all of us who work at LACNIC. They generated debate, opened lines of dialogue, and kept us in direct contact with the academic world that provides so much help for deciding in which direction to channel our work.

Now that I've mentioned research, I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to point out another basic tool for the work carried out by LACNIC: dialogue. Dialogue as a platform for building relationships, both external as well as internal. At LACNIC we work through dialogue: decisions are not imposed, they are recognized. Just as a person believing that he or she is a leader does not make that person a leader but, instead, their recognition as such by others does, good working environments are not decreed –they are built on open dialogue. I can proudly say that this feature is our organization's daily bread.

Of course, this matrix and this way of working is not exclusive to LACNIC: it characterizes most of our peers and our partners in other regions around the world. In this area, too, we must celebrate what has been achieved, but at the same time we must further enhance dialogue and proactive interaction. **We must learn to listen, and know how to learn from others.**

Recently, when we opened the Internet Hub for Latin America and the Caribbean, a person close to our organization told me that, from their point of view, what was most valuable was not the achievements attained by LACNIC themselves but the fact that they had been attained working from an open, peaceful and happy environment. "People sometimes think that work is the opposite of happiness and feeling good; LACNIC is an example of the fact that the opposite can be true," he said.

This compliment has stayed on my mind, as it touches a key issue with which I would like to end this speech: happiness.

PART III: The Challenges

All of the challenges I mentioned before should not allow us to forget that happiness is the ultimate goal of everything we do. Aristotle said that the single highest objective in life is to "live well." This "living well" is happiness, something we are all somehow trying to find.

I am convinced that the Internet is a tool that helps us in this search. I remember when I obtained my first email address, I used to receive apocalyptic messages about the new world of technology: stupefied children, adults isolated from the world and locked in their homes in front of their screens, predictions anticipating the end of human relationships, of trust, of the community. The passage of time has done nothing but prove all these alarms wrong.

Technology has introduced a new dimension to human relations, a new way of understanding communication. We live in an interconnected world where the pursuit of happiness can be related to what is happening on the other side of the globe, where technological tools allow us to express ourselves and lean on others in new and meaningful ways.

In the immediate future, language barriers will be eliminated, as real-time translation systems will allow us to speak in our own language and make ourselves understood anywhere in the world, over the phone, using instant messaging or any other form of communication. This will be a turning point in human

relationships, as it will exponentially increase our ability to communicate, open new doors, provide us with more options so that everyone can find happiness.

We are undergoing a process of transformation that will lead to new ways of active participation in our communities' destiny, increased motivations for acting and influencing society, more room to expand our capabilities.

None of this ensures happiness, but it certainly invites optimism. The Internet does not equal happiness – no tool or technology can be mistaken for happiness. But it is a medium that helps us in our search, one that does not hinder our pursuit. **The Internet is an invitation to optimism and enthusiasm, two ingredients that make up human happiness as do values and freedom.** A relationship exists between development and Human Rights. The Internet is an important tool for building that optimistic future.

In this spirit, which creates a framework for the growth and innovation of all other freedoms; in this spirit, which celebrates technological modernization and abundance if not detrimental to our values; in this spirit, which reveals that what we are doing is seeking happiness just as human beings have always done; **in this optimistic and enthusiastic spirit we celebrate LACNIC's 10th anniversary and state our clear commitment to continue working for many years to come.**

Thank you very much.