Ms. Lesley Cowley
ccNSO Chairperson

7 May 2012

Dear Lesley,

As you know, one of the basic premises that we, ICANN, operate under is the integrity of the ISO-3166 two-letter codes. As a widely acknowledged international standard, the two-letter codes are used by several international organizations, including ICANN, for various purposes: currency codes, ccTLDs, SWIFT codes, etc.

Once a two-letter ascii code is designated to a country or territory by ISO, that country or territory is automatically entitled to apply to ICANN to use that two letter ascii combination as its ccTLD. ICANN has no control over the designation of the two letter ascii codes and refers to the ISO designations to determine eligibility for two-letter ascii country codes.

In the interests of the stability of the Internet and to avoid confusing Internet users, ICANN has protected all two-letter combinations in ascii. In the gTLD environment this means a prohibition on two character ascii strings. In the Fast Track IDN ccTLD environment this means a prohibition on two character IDN strings that are remarkably similar to a two character ascii string. A two character IDN string that is technically and visually similar to a two letter ascii string is referred to as confusingly similar. Since there is a finite number of two character ascii codes, the prohibitions are respected even if the two character ascii combination has not yet been assigned by ISO.

During the IDN Fast Track process, there have been a number of occasions where an applied for string has been deemed to be confusingly similar to a two-letter ascii string even when ISO has yet to assign the two-letter code to a country or territory.

Given the issues that have arisen in the IDN Fast Track, ICANN is seeking input from the ccNSO on the position that ICANN has taken regarding the protection of all possible two character ascii strings. We look forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Best Regards,

Elise Gerich
Vice President, IANA and Technical Operations

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