

July 2013

**U.S. STATEMENT ON GEOGRAPHIC NAMES
IN ADVANCE OF ICANN DURBAN MEETING**

The United States has listened carefully to the concerns expressed by colleagues on certain geographic strings. It is our sincere hope that individual governments can resolve their concerns on specific geographic strings through agreements on specific safeguards negotiated with the relevant applicants. We encourage all parties to continue to do so leading to Durban. However, in the event the parties cannot reach agreement by the time this matter comes up for decision in the GAC, the United States is willing in Durban to abstain and remain neutral on .shenzen (IDN in Chinese), .persiangulf, .guangzhou (IDN in Chinese), .amazon (and IDNs in Japanese and Chinese), .patagonia, .yun, and .thai, thereby allowing the GAC to present consensus objections on these strings to the Board, if no other government objects.

The United States affirms our support for the free flow of information and freedom of expression and does not view sovereignty as a valid basis for objecting to the use of terms, and we have concerns about the effect of such claims on the integrity of the process. We considered that the GAC was of the same mind when it accepted ICANN's definition of geographic names in February 2011 and agreed that any potential confusion with a geographic name could be mitigated through agreement between the applicant and the concerned government. In addition, the United States is not aware of an international consensus that recognizes inherent governmental rights in geographic terms. Therefore, the choice made in this discrete case does not prejudice future United States positions within the ICANN model or beyond.

Recognizing that the current rules for the new gTLD program do not specifically prohibit or condition these strings, we expect the specific issue of how to better address individual government concerns as well as other relevant considerations, including the free flow of information and freedom of expression, in the context of geographic terms, to be considered in the review of the new gTLD program as mandated by the *Affirmation of Commitments*. This review hopefully will provide guidance as to how better to address this issue in future rounds of new gTLDs.