

U.N. to control use of Internet?

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Developing countries want global body to govern cyberspace

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Leaders of a U.N. Internet panel yesterday said they hope to set up a global system where cyberspace would be under the control of the United Nations.

The committee, which was set up in December 2003, is laying the groundwork for the U.N.-sponsored World Summit on the Information Society where a final decision on the control of the Net will be determined, stated a Reuters report. The summit will take place in Tunis in November.

The panel is considering such problems as cyber-crime and e-mail spam.

ICANN, the International Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, currently is the most recognizable Internet governing body, but developing countries want a U.N. agency, such as the International Telecommunication Union, to have control over domain names and other issues.

"There is an issue that is out there and that needs to be resolved," Nitin Desai, chairman of the panel and special adviser to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, told Reuters.

Incorporated in 1998, ICANN oversees management of the Internet's addressing system, which matches numerical addresses to website addresses. Critics claim ICANN is subject to U.S. political influence.

According to the report, developing countries see the International Telecommunication Union, a 138-year-old trade body that among other things established country code rules for international telephone calls, as better able to deal with Internet governance.

At the first World Summit on the Information Society in 2003, French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin called for international rules to govern the Net.

"The information society offers new opportunities, but like all new technological revolutions it also brings uncertainty," Raffarin said. "It calls on us to establish international rules, which citizens can rely on."

At the time, China was leading efforts to globalize Internet control. Beijing allows its own citizens online access, but only with government surveillance. China was joined in its efforts by representatives of Syria, Egypt, Vietnam and South Africa.

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