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On behalf of the Leadership Panel of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and its Multistakeholder Advisory Group, I am pleased to offer our views.. The IGF was created in 2005 as one of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). Fast forwarding to 2024, there can be no doubt about the enabling and amplifying power of the Internet. It is estimated that about 5.5 billion people have regular access to the Internet today. The “digital divide” is still about 2.5 billion people wide. Moreover, as the applications running on the Internet continue to evolve, those with access widen the gap.

The amplifying power of the Internet has been harnessed for hugely beneficial purposes. Research to respond to the COVID pandemic was significantly aided by Internet access. Schools and offices were able to “work from home” during this period, where the Internet was available. We have also learned, however, that not all uses of the Internet have been beneficial. Malware, ransomware, denial of service attacks, Internet shutdowns, social media bullying and many other unsavory activities take advantage of the power of the Internet in harmful ways. These positive and negative topics have fueled IGF discussion since its first meeting in Athens.

The IGF has evolved over the course of its 18 years of operation. Over 6000 people attended the most recent IGF in Kyoto, Japan and as many as 9000 are anticipated in the 2024 IGF in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. As of 2023, things like the 155 National or Regional Internet Governance Forums (NRIs), Dynamic Coalitions and Best Practice Forums have spontaneously arisen to carry out intersessional work between the annual IGFs. The scope of the topics under consideration has expanded well beyond the early focus on the Internet itself. Indeed, it has truly become a Global Digital Forum and would be an ideal instrument for tracking the successful implementation of the soon-to-be-born Global Digital Compact. If we did not have one already, we would have to re-invent the IGF for the GDC. My IGF and LP colleagues and I look forward to serving the UN should there be an agreement on such an expanded mission for the IGF and its NRI network.

Vint Cerf, Chair, Leadership Panel of the Internet Governance Forum