

Govts Urged To Boost Africa's Presence On The Web

An appeal has been made to African governments to help boost the continent's presence on the worldwide web by submitting lists of important names for inclusion in the dotAfrica Reserved Names List (RNL) process.

That's the word from the ZA Central Registry (ZACR) and African Union Commission (AUC) which are partners in the drive for Africa to have its own space on the Internet through the dotAfrica generic Top Level Domain (gTLD).

"By protecting their interests in relation to geographic, cultural, linguistic and religious names, African governments will be playing an active role in helping to create a diverse and robust African Internet economy," said Alice Munyua of the AUC and ZACR dotAfrica initiative.

She added, however, that African governments should only reserve names that are substantively in their sovereign interest and are of national significance. "Some names may find a more beneficial home within the private sector where they can be properly promoted and developed for the greater good of the region," explained Ms Munyua.

The deadline for reserving dotAfrica names that are particularly important to individual African governments was previously the first week of February 2014 and has now been extended to the end of March 2014.

The RNL process is yielding excellent results with 17 African countries and the AU reserving names, over 600 reserved names approved, 26 names pending approval and no rejections thus far.

Benin was the first African country to reserve a dotAfrica generic Top Level Domain (gTLD) name—Benin. Africa—and the list of entities that have submitted lists of reserved dotAfrica names now includes Niger, Benin, Senegal, Mauritius, Ghana, Burundi, Algeria, Tanzania, Morocco, Namibia, Tunisia, Uganda, South Africa, South Sudan, Egypt, Gabon, Liberia, and the African Union (AU).

"As the envisaged May 2014 launch date for the new dotAfrica domain draws closer, it is now critical that all other African countries who desire a dotAfrica presence place their important names on the RNL," said Ms Munyua. She added that several countries have held national multi stakeholder processes to develop their lists, which is commendable.

Countries that do not submit a list of reserved names risk having their important names taken by commercial and other entities when the RNL process closes. Should some African governments fail to register their names, it is likely that the AUC could reserve a small number of important geographic names on their behalf.

The above notwithstanding, it is important to emphasize that reserved names should be carefully-selected as it is not the intention of the RNL process to reserve large numbers of names indefinitely, the reservation period is 12 months after the launch date. Only country and offensive names will be reserved indefinitely. Following the closure of the RNL process, the ZACR hopes that governments will redeem the reserved names after having nominated beneficiaries for all them.

Resources have been made available to ensure a seamless RNL process. These include the Reserve Name List portal, which aims to facilitate the efficient submission of names. In addition, the RNL policy (<http://www.africainonespace.org/downloads/Government%20Reserve%20Names%20Policy.pdf>) RNL guidelines (<http://africainonespace.org/rnlguide>), which provide practical information on policies, processes and requirements, while an RNL introductory video can be found here: <http://www.africainonespace.org/rnl.php?welcome>. For the complete list of reserved names submitted to date, visit: <http://africainonespace.org/rnl.php?rnllookup>.

The Government Reserved Names Policy is intended to protect various categories of names associated with individual African states. Governments have received priority in registering certain categories of names, including the names of countries, regions, provinces, governments, government departments and so on. Also included are other domain names that relate directly to official governmental initiatives, such as the promotion of trade or tourism.

When the ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names & Numbers) registration process is complete and dotAfrica is opened up for use, companies and individuals will be able to apply for their own names.

The plan to create the dotAfrica gTLD name has been endorsed by African governments, through the AUC and other representative stakeholders after extensive cross-continental consultation. The ZACR has been endorsed as the official operator of the dotAfrica registry and its dotAfrica ICANN

application has already passed Initial Evaluation. This means the ZACR is now awaiting contracting terms from ICANN before launching dotAfrica in May 2014.