

30 June 2016

Excellency,

In coordination with the executive heads of international governmental organizations (“IGOs”, listed in the enclosed Annex), I seek your help, along with that of all Foreign Ministers of the Member States of the United Nations, with respect to the unauthorized use of IGO names and acronyms on the Internet.

Specifically, I seek the assistance of your Government in obtaining protection for the names and acronyms of IGOs from being registered as Internet Domain Names by third parties who misrepresent themselves as the IGOs in question. Protection of IGO acronyms is especially important, since acronyms (e.g., UNICEF, OECD, UNHCR) are how our organizations are widely known and, therefore, present the greatest risk of abuse.

For IGOs, the internet is a double-edged sword. Just as it allows us to serve and to educate billions of people worldwide, it also provides opportunities for malicious actors to seek material gain at public expense. Such actors have posed as IGOs in order to disseminate misinformation or to illegitimately profit from the public missions and goodwill of IGOs by collecting fraudulent “donations”. Practices observed around last year’s Ebola epidemic demonstrate how damaging this can be. A number of websites and e-mails posing as IGOs, such as the World Health Organization, purported to offer advice in the face of a global public health crisis, while their true aim was installing malware to control users’ computers and to steal passwords.

There is a sure way to address this issue: preliminarily blocking the illicit registration of domain names corresponding to IGO names and acronyms. The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a non-profit corporation, administers the internet Domain Name System (DNS). IGOs have repeatedly appealed to ICANN to protect their names and acronyms in the DNS. Over the last four years, a coalition of IGOs has sought from the ICANN Board safeguards that reflect the protection that IGO names and acronyms enjoy under domestic and international laws. At the same time, IGOs made it clear that they would not take issue with legitimately sought third-party domain name registrations which would not pose risks to IGO missions.