MENOG 21 Highlights Key Areas to Strengthen Internet Infrastructure in the Middle East

- *The second virtual edition centres discussions on how MENA alters Internet operations and drives shift to a peering-based network for better connectivity*
- *Key regional Internet players share experiences, offer technical updates and identify areas for potential collaboration*

November 2, 2021- The 21st edition of the Middle East Network Operator Group Meeting and Peering Forum (MENOG) was recently concluded with successful discussions on developments and technologies being deployed across the region to support network reliability as well as highlight the changes that have happened in the Middle East's Internet landscape. A crowd of 117 stakeholders joined this edition from 27 countries.

The RIPE NCC hosted the virtual edition and has convened esteemed technological experts including Imad Kreidieh, Chairman, Director General, OGERO, Lebanon; Shahab Vahabzadeh, Chief Technology Officer, Qbic Communications, UAE; Anwar Chalamannil, Head of Network and Security Operations, FIFA 2022 Supreme Committee, Qatar; Bernd Spiess, Senior Peering Manager & Consultant, DE-CIX, Germany; Nathalie Trenaman, Routing Security Programme Manager, RIPE NCC, and Atif Naveed, Senior ISP Engineer, STC Bahrain, Bahrain. The online forum was moderated by Hisham Ibrahim, Chief Community Officer at RIPE NCC.

The event's key topics included recent deployments in measurement infrastructure at UAE-IX, traffic flows in the Middle East, Central Asia and Caucasus-interconnected regions, revamping networks for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, Internet resilience during Lebanon's economic crises, a routing security update, and experiences with deploying RPKI.

Highlights:

Anwar Chalamannil explained that for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, the network plan will be centralised since all the stadia are in Doha, in contrast to the previous host where everything was on a distributed network.

Shahab Vahabzadeh reported on the emerging traffic patterns in the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. Frankfurt is reportedly receiving more than 80% of traffic from Iraq, Afghanistan and

Iran, excluding Arab countries. Meanwhile, gaming traffic is being diverted to the south, particularly to the United Arab Emirates.

Imad Kreidieh explained how OGERO is keeping the Internet up and running in Lebanon amid major concerns in the country, such as maintaining connectivity with the rest of the globe. COVID-19, the civil strike, unstable foreign currency exchange and economic turmoil have halted many activities in the country. As a result of an inability to get diesel, spare parts, accessories and fundamental elements, the deployment of fibre optic cables has been delayed. Despite all of this, OGERO is at the forefront of Lebanon's digitalisation efforts through the establishment of a national cloud centre.

Regarding UAE-IX, Bernd Spiess shed light on recent developments in measurement infrastructure at the UAE internet exchange point and explained how these exchanges at various locations across the region significantly impact the traffic build-up. He also highlighted the significance of peering in reducing latency. Internet exchange points are built to support growth and handle sudden spikes in traffic, and the UAE is seeing a great push of traffic towards UAE-IX. He concluded that there is a need for a more complex and advanced Internet ecosystem to meet the demands of global networks, network operators and content providers in the GCC.

Nathalie Trenaman presented an RPKI update and emphasised the strict characteristics of the Border Gateway Protocol (BGP). Some highlights of her presentation include how rapid urbanisation and growing Internet usage in this region are driving the demand for secure information transferring protocols. She tackled how companies are developing efficient IT infrastructure for communication purposes and are one of the crucial factors for the development of the industry. On the other hand, complexity in the installation of routing devices as well as high maintenance cost may act as a restraint for the BGP market.

She also discussed the adoption of routing statements (ROAs) in various countries. Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Oman and Yemen have stated their routing intentions for over 90% of IP addresses. Other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan, have low usage of ROAs, with some as low as 10%.

Following Trenaman's discussion on RPKI, Atif Naveed also shared his RPKI deployment experiences. He explained that any operator must ensure accuracy for the type of IP block to be advertised and how it will be allocated, such as a /22. He concluded that time is short in terms of making the choice to switch to a new technology and implementing it.

Dr. Ali Nasser Al-Khoieldi, former CEO of the Communications and Media Commission in Iraq, concluded the forum by announcing Iraq NOG in collaboration with the RIPE NCC.

Hisham Ibrahim, Chief Community Officer at the RIPE NCC, stated: "The pandemic has brought an influx of internet usage coupled with the wide digitalisation of businesses and organisations. Virtual meetings and conferences are increasing the region's dependence on and need for better connectivity. MENOG 21 serves as a forum to discuss these issues as well as to raise awareness of the deployment of technology for robust, reliable and efficient networking in the region. We will continue to demonstrate our capabilities and foster collaborations between organisations and sectors to establish better infrastructure, especially for distressed regions."

MENOG 21 echoes the success of its previous editions in gathering the technical community to discuss and exchange experiences and insights for advanced Internet infrastructure, adaptive policy regulations and stronger collaboration within the region.

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About RIPE NCC:

The RIPE NCC is an independent, not-for-profit membership organization that supports the infrastructure of the Internet through technical coordination in Europe, Middle East and parts of Central Asia. The most prominent activity of the RIPE NCC is to act as the Regional Internet Registry (RIR) providing global Internet resources and related services (IPv4, IPv6 and AS Numbers) to members in the RIPE NCC service region. The RIPE NCC also provides services for the benefit of the Internet community at large. The RIPE NCC operates from its main office in Amsterdam and from its regional office in Dubai. www.ripe.net

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