If Internet governance ain't broke, don't fix it: U.S.

Tom Miles, Reuters

(Reuters) - The best solution to improving oversight of the Internet may be to do nothing at all, a senior U.S. official said on Monday while briefing reporters on a conference in December that could decide to consolidate control within a U.N. body.

The International Telecommunication Union, the U.N. body convening the conference, has said there is broad consensus that the treaty governing the way international voice, data and video traffic is handled needs to be updated after 24 years.

With the rapid spread of the Internet around the world, the 178 signatories have decided to look into ways of increasing collaboration, using telecoms to drive economic development, and making the rules more relevant and responsive to the fast-evolving industry.

However, doing nothing "would not be a terrible outcome at all", said U.S. Ambassador Terry Kramer, who will head the U.S. delegation at the World Conference on International Telecommunications, which will be held in Dubai.

"The natural path we're on is pretty good," he told reporters in Geneva.

"Does that mean there aren't things that could improve? Absolutely there are things that could improve. But the best thing to do, if you could pick two options, one is to get prescriptive and get into a lot of things versus leaving things open, we're much better by leaving things open."

He rejected suggestions that the United States was taking a negative approach to meeting, which will renegotiate a treaty last revisited in 1988, and said other countries' ideas about putting rules in place to force the Internet to develop were the more negative proposals.

The treaty comprises international telecommunications regulations (ITRs) that set out principles for ensuring that networks can connect with each other smoothly.

Kramer said any work done at the conference should ultimately benefit citizens, consumers and society at large.

"We need to avoid suffocating the Internet space through well-meaning but overly prescriptive proposals that would seek to control content or seek to mandate routing and payment practices. That would send the Internet back to a circuit switch era that is actually passing in history," he said.

He said cyber security, cyber crime and national defense issues should be excluded from the regulations, since these were better handled elsewhere.

He declined to say if the United States was simply trying to preserve its freedom to conduct its cyber foreign policy how it chooses.

"If people have a concern with what the U.S. does, they certainly can raise those issues and there are international environments where those things get discussed. Our message is in the ITRs, that is not the right place to bring those up," he said.

(Editing by Alison Williams)

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