

Profile: Maureen Hernandez

“ THE INTERNET IS A REALLY HUMAN PLACE ”

Maureen Hernandez wants the Internet to stay open and free. “It’s a tool for the evolution of society. Keeping it open makes it a tool for the development of people, not just for commercial use,” she says.

Maureen is a systems engineer with an unusually high regard for the human component of systems. After several years of development experience, she is currently completing her undergraduate studies, with a thesis on the use of TV white spaces as wireless Internet spectrum (see sidebar)—a technology with potential to extend Internet access into unserved areas.

Maureen was introduced to the Internet Society by the trainers at a workshop in Panama on wireless networking, offered by Foundation Escuela Latinoamericana de Redes (EsLaRed). She applied to the Internet Society for a Fellowship to the Internet Engineering Task Force (IETF), and was accepted. As a first-time Fellow, she found it difficult to follow the IETF’s somewhat complex procedures, but “I met great people!” It was at that first IETF meeting (IETF 87, Berlin) that she got ‘hooked’ on the Internet.

Maureen says, “I decided that working on the Internet is what I wanted to do. I found out that the Internet was a really human place.”

“I started reading, and I fell in love with the Internet’s history. The story is such an exciting intersection of the human will to collaborate, and technology. The founders were able to build this amazing thing and give it to the world—it really moved me.”

“A friend who knew of my enthusiasm, Encel Sanchez, had participated in the Internet Society’s Next Generation Leaders (NGL) eLearning programme, and he recommended that I take the NGL course, *Shaping the Internet: History and Futures*, because it offered the fullest picture available. So I applied, took the course, and then had the opportunity to attend the IGF meeting in Brazil, as an Ambassador from the Internet Society.”



**MAUREEN HERNANDEZ,
VENEZUELA**

Internet Society Fellowships:

eLearning programme, Fellow to IETF, Ambassador to IGF

Advice to those seeking to work in Internet Governance: “Study Internet history. If we want to know where we are going, we need to know where we are coming from.”

What she wishes she had known:

“I should have started college at 12—I’m a learning addict. The more I learn, the more I see that I need to learn. Also, I wish I had realized even younger than I did that Facebook is not the Internet—and I hope others will realize that at younger ages, as well.”

Person she admires: Elizabeth Feinler. “She led the first Network Information Center (NIC), created domain names, and did so many other things that were essential to developing the Internet. I met her at the IETF. She is such an inspiration to me.”

Favorite place: “Home, and Trieste, Italy. Trieste is very calm, and I like the silence and relaxation.”

Favorite food: Pizza!

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) was an amazing experience for her. She knew the issues she wanted to focus on even before she went.

“Policy will be critical in dealing with shared spectrum,” she notes. “You can’t deal with the technical without the human. We need to maintain this spectrum (TV white space) so it will work for both the private sector and for shared usage by nonprofit organizations and the government.”

Maureen believes there are endless opportunities to use shared spectrum to help communities meet their challenges. Emergency warning and response systems—for tsunamis, earthquakes, and tornadoes—are just one possibility. At the IGF, she had the opportunity to talk with participants about how the Internet offers a solution for each of these.

Like other Ambassadors to the IGF, she had an inspiring conversation with Vint Cerf. She also met some people from a group called AlterMundi in Argentina, which is doing the very type of work she wants to do—bringing the Internet to small towns and villages using free software and low-cost hardware. She is hoping to have the opportunity to work with them to get some hands-on experience in Argentina, and then apply it to Venezuela. She has already targeted the very spot—a rural village in Mérida.

Maureen is currently working to create an Internet Center for Society in her department (engineering) at the University of Los Andes. The Center would keep students informed of recent developments in the Internet, provide a resource for research on the Internet, and encourage them to work on making the Internet “a better place.”

Maureen says that with an Internet penetration rate of about 60%, Venezuela is doing fairly well. The biggest problem with access is in the rural areas. However, even in urban areas, very low bandwidth is an issue; typically, connections are at less than 2 megabytes per second.

While security is not Maureen’s main focus, she does want to be sure that as the next billion people get connected, they will be participating in “a safe Internet, a place of opportunities, not a place without security or privacy.” She sees keeping the Internet neutral and open as a human right—along with speeding up the rate at which people are getting connected so that “we don’t delay or interfere with the freedom of the billions still waiting to connect.”

TV White Space and the Internet

The advent of digital TV reduced the amount of radio frequency spectrum required to carry TV signals, as digital channels require less spectrum to separate them. Most of the unused spectrum (white space) can be released for other uses. By reserving some of that spectrum for transmitting Internet signal (on a similar principal to WiFi), countries can make provision for extending signal to areas that did not previously have Internet access.

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