

First Committee

Topic Area A: Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security

Advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) present both opportunities and challenges. In the range of threats that states and the global community face, ICTs are unique: they are ever-present, and not inherently military in nature. Moreover, there are multiple ways in which ICTs can pose security threats. They can be used to damage information resources and infrastructures, and terrorist or criminal groups can use them to communicate, solicit funding, and could use ICTs as means to disrupt economic institutions. Also, national critical infrastructures are becoming increasingly reliant on ICTs, such that any disruption caused by malicious intent could pose serious consequences for national security and public safety.

ICTs are often owned and operated by the private sector, and their potential to create harm is largely based on users' motives. They have both civilian and military uses, especially for maintaining international stability and security, and ICT maintenance is vital for the development of global and national economies. The United Nations is working closely with Member States and the international community to encourage collaboration on advancing the security and effectiveness of this technology. There is also disagreement at the international level about what constitutes acceptable use of ICTs by states; that is, to what extent can and should states develop ICTs for military and intelligence purposes?

While ICTs are a relatively recent innovation, the United Nations has been engaged in developing a common framework of the role of ICTs in the global community and in assessing the potential threats that they pose to peace and security. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) took place, in 2003 (first phase) and 2005 (second phase). This was the first high-level UN meeting to specifically address communication technology. The WSIS products, the Geneva Declaration of Principles and the Tunis Agenda, both took a broad view of information technology within a global context addressing its role in development, capacity-building in the developing world, and a financing mechanism. Action Line C5 in the Declaration of Principles covers the need for building confidence and enhancing the security of ICTs. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) is charged with monitoring progress on the WSIS Plan of Action and WSIS plus 5 goals.

In May 2007, the ITU established the Global Cybercrime Agenda (GCA). The GCA established a High-Level Experts Group (HLEG) to provide the ITU with recommendations. In their Global Strategic Report, the group recommended that legal measures, technical and procedural measures, organizational structures, capacity building, and international cooperation all needed further attention from the international community.

The General Assembly (GA) has also been actively engaged in monitoring ICT developments and their impact on international security. The GA has called on Member States to engage in multilateral discussions of current and potential threats to telecommunication networks. The GA has made ongoing requests for Member States to inform the Secretary-General of their progress in strengthening

information security and opportunities for the international community to strengthen information security at the global level. Also the General Assembly requested that the Secretary General convene a Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security.

The Group of Experts outlined potential threats ICTs could pose to the global community, such as terrorist organizations using ICTs to advance their networks. The most recent report to the GA from the Group of Experts in 2010 provided a list of recommendations to the General Assembly that included (1) engaging in dialogue with Member States on acceptable norms for state use of ICT, (2) supporting confidence-building, stability and risk reduction measures for State use of ICTs, (3) facilitating information exchange on national, regional, and international security strategies, and (4) supporting capacity-building in less developed countries.

Information and Communication Technology will continue to play an important role for both economic and social development. Solutions to help fund and develop the efficiency and security of their ICTs are crucial for peace and security. The UN will continue to play a key role in facilitating cooperation among Member States against dangers posed to ICT systems and infrastructure. The General Assembly has requested that the Secretary-General establish a future group of governmental experts in 2012 to continue researching solutions on this topic. Until then, the standards on the use for ICTs and measures to foster strategic security-building are likely to remain on the GA agenda.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include

- How can states and the international community balance to the need for need for enhanced security for ICTs while at the same time capitalizing on their potential benefits to social and economic development?
- How do the challenges of ensuring the security of ICTs differ in developing countries vs. developed countries?
- What role should the private sector play in ensuring the security of telecommunication networks?

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A/RES/62/17

A/RES/60/45

WSIS-03/GENEVA/DOC/0009 (rev. 1)

WSIS-05/TUNIS/DOC/6 (rev. 1)

Additional Web Resources

www.itu.int/ – International Telecommunication Union

ict4peace.org – ICT 4 Peace Foundation

www.unidr.org/html/en/home.html – United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

www.un-gaid.org – Global Alliance for ICT and Development

www.interpol.int – International Criminal Police Organization