Remarks at the High-Level Event entitled “Impact of cyberattacks on international relations and security: a multidimensional perspective”

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by

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H.E. Minister Sultan bin Saad al-Muraikhi  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here with you today, to join you in the discussion of a topic that is gaining urgency and importance every day – the topic of cyber security.

The internet is reshaping our world. It has allowed for powerful innovations that drive our economies, societies and cultures, and can be leveraged to help us achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. However, a peaceful ICT environment is not a given.

Instead, the global ICT environment has become subject to a disconcerting trend of malicious use of ICTs by both State and non-State actors. Cyberattacks have had a direct impact on people’s lives. These attacks disable critical infrastructure on which we depend, compromise sensitive data and financial transactions and can be used for disinformation. Cyber incidents are contributing to a diminishing trust between States.

This is why cybersecurity has become a top priority of the UN Secretary-General.

Firstly, he has established a High-level Panel on Digital Cooperation, which has just met in person for the first time earlier this week. This new Panel aims to raise awareness about the transformative impact of digital technologies across society and the economy, and to contribute to the broader public debate on how to ensure a safe and inclusive digital future for all.

Secondly, in May of this year, the Secretary-General launched his comprehensive agenda for disarmament, entitled “Securing our Common Future”. One of the agenda’s three priorities areas is “disarmament for future generations”, which encompasses ensuring a peaceful cyberspace.

In this Agenda, the Secretary-General has committed himself to engaging with Member States to help foster accountability and adherence to norms of responsible State behaviour.

Furthermore, the Secretary-General has also committed to making available his good offices, should States request this of him, to contribute to the prevention
and peaceful settlement of conflict stemming from malicious activity in cyberspace.

Experts point out that cyber risks can be state-sponsored, undertaken by transnational criminal organizations with sophisticated technical capabilities, and in some limited cases, by the lone individual hacker.

Cyberattacks from such perpetrators can pose implications for national security. International cooperation and multilateral efforts will be necessary to address these threats.

At the UN, Member States started discussions on cyber security in 1998, when only 2.5% of humankind were connected to the internet. Since 2004, five Groups of Governmental Experts, or GGEs, have studied how to deal with the threats posed by the use of ICTs in the context of international security.

They have provided us with a common understanding on how international law applies in the use of ICTs, recommended 11 voluntary, non-binding norms on responsible State behaviour and have also recommended practical measures for confidence-building and capacity-building with an emphasis on dialogue, transparency, information sharing and cooperation and assistance.

In 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution [70/237] by consensus in which it “calls upon Member States to be guided in their use of information and communications technologies by the 2015 report of the Group of Governmental Experts.”

The recommendations of the 2015 GGE report should therefore inform and guide the policies and decisions of UN Member States in the use of ICTs.

Taken together the recommendations of the GGE reports aim to establish trust between States in cyberspace through ensuring predictability and accountability.

Discussions on a normative framework to ensure the use of ICTs for peaceful purposes will no doubt continue to evolve, other Groups of Governmental Experts may be established.

But let us remember that States already have a solid basis upon which they can build their efforts to increase openness and transparency, and strengthen trust.

The first step is to start implementing measures that all governments have already agreed, and to take concrete steps to strengthen cooperation at the regional and global levels.
In this, the United Nations stands ready to work with and to support you in your efforts to forge an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful ICT environment.

Thank you.