Key-note speech at Regional Consultations of the Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security with the Organization of American States

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Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be able to join you for this important event today.

I would like to express my appreciation to Canada, as Chair of the Inter-American Committee Against Terrorism, as well as the CICTE Secretariat, for organizing these regional consultations for the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security.

I am very grateful that Ambassador Guilherme Patriota of Brazil, Chair of the GGE and Ambassador Jürg Lauber of Switzerland, Chair of the Open-ended Working Group, are both present with us today – I am heartened by both Chairs’ strong commitment, not only to their respective processes, but to working in coordination and making the two processes as complementary as possible.

I want to use this opportunity to reflect on three elements: First, the purpose of these regional consultations. Second, the current work being done at the global and regional levels to promote international ICT-security. And third, to provide some thoughts on the forthcoming intergovernmental processes on ICTs in the context of international security at the United Nations.

First, the purpose of these regional consultations

Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2018, the UN General Assembly mandated the establishment of an Open-ended Working Group as well as a Group of Governmental Experts. Both processes bring new innovations for inclusivity to the work of ICTs at the UN. The Open-ended Working Group is a forum where all States are invited to discussions on the topic. The GGE includes not only informal consultations with all States but also brings in the important regional work being done on international ICT-security.
And this is why we are meeting today. Regional consultations are a two-way opportunity. They raise awareness of the work being done by the GGEs but also allow the GGE Chair and members to gain insight into the work and the priorities of different regions and, through this, to perhaps find new ways for taking forward the work of the GGE.

Importantly, these regional consultations are an useful opportunity to foster engagement and interaction with the private sector, academia and civil society, which is absolutely invaluable if we are serious about finding collective solutions to the threats facing us in cyberspace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The malicious use of cyberspace continues unabated, undermining trust between States and posing significant risks to international peace and security.

This backdrop is why Secretary-General Guterres has made cybersecurity a priority. In his Agenda for Disarmament, he made a commitment to work with Member States to foster a culture of accountability and adherence to emerging norms, rules and principles on responsible behaviour in cyberspace.

He also established an independent High-Level Panel on Digital Cooperation, co-chaired by Melinda Gates and Jack Ma. The Panel’s report, issued in June of this year, contains ideas on how to harness the key opportunities and address the challenges facing us in the digital sphere.

I hope that your discussions today, as well as those ahead of us, help to pursue these objectives.

I now turn to the work done at the UN and by the OAS to promote international ICT-security

At the United Nations, a series of Groups of Governmental Experts, or GGEs, have made important assessments and recommendations on the use of ICTs in the context of international security. Their work has accumulated into what I believe can be called a nascent normative framework that guides States in their use of ICTs. This framework includes confidence-building measures, or CBMs, norms of responsible State behaviour, the application of international law in cyberspace and capacity-building.

The OAS, for its part, has taken the lead in translating the recommendations of the GGEs to the regional context through cooperation in the development of national strategies and building the capacities of Computer Security Incident Response Teams. This is highly relevant, as a lack of
capacity can make a State, along with its citizens, systems and infrastructure, vulnerable to ICT incidents or make it an unwitting haven for malicious actors. The agreement by OAS to adopt six CBMs is also a welcome development. CBMs, as implemented in different regions, can contribute substantially to transparency, predictability and stability in the use of ICTs by States.

The work of the OAS also underlines the great value of building synergies between recommendations made at the global level and regional dynamics. I hope these synergies will continue to be formed, and that the experience of the OAS will inform the work of the GGE, as well as the OEWG.

In closing, allow me to say a few words about the GGE and OEWG processes from the UN’s perspective

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot stress enough that we are not beginning the work of these two forthcoming processes on a blank slate. The deliberations of the OEWG and the GGE should be informed by the important work that has been done to develop common understandings about the challenges facing us and ways to address them.

This includes efforts undertaken at the global level, under the auspices of the United Nations, but also at the regional level, such as within the OAS.

At the same time, although States take the lead in these discussions, I believe the role of industry, academia and civil society cannot be understated. I therefore welcome their participation over the past few days and I am glad that continued interactions with a broad range of stakeholders are included in both the GGE and the OEWG processes.

I would like to remind you that all non-governmental organizations can apply for accreditation to the intersessional multi-stakeholder meeting of the Open-Ended Working Group.

It is important that we engage in the upcoming deliberations in a constructive atmosphere. This includes close coordination and complementarity between the two processes. I would encourage you to consider creative ways through which each process can approach particular issues – whether in terms of breadth or depth – in order to avoid duplication of work, but nevertheless deliver on respective mandates.
One thing is clear: progress in ensuring the peaceful and responsible use of ICTs depends on the success of both processes.

Rest assured, the United Nations Secretariat stands ready, as always, to support you all in the important work that lies ahead, and that begins with the discussions you will undertake today.

I wish you a successful meeting.

Thank you.