Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security

Opening address by Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

New York
9 December 2019
Thank you, Ambassador Patriota.

Distinguished Experts,

It is a pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of UN Secretary-General António Guterres, to the first of four sessions of the Group of Governmental Experts or “GGE” on Advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security.

Allow me to extend my deep congratulations to each of you on your selection to be a member of this Group. In particular, I extend my warmest congratulations to Ambassador Guilherme Patriota of Brazil on his election as Chair of this GGE, and also to express my heartfelt thanks to him for taking on this challenging – but hopefully also very rewarding – task.

As you are aware, issues related to ICT security has become one of the top priorities of the United Nations, and of the Secretary-General himself.

As the Secretary-General has recently noted, the “growing frequency and severity of cyber-attacks are undermining trust and encouraging States to adopt offensive postures for the hostile use of cyberspace”. And “If we do not work together to address our divisions, we will be remembered as the generation that ruined the early promise of the Internet”.

This is precisely why the work of this GGE is of utmost importance. As you begin your important task today. Please allow me to offer a few thoughts.

First, the existing foundation on which to build the GGE’s work.

As Ambassador Patriota has mentioned, this is the sixth GGE that has been established by the Secretary-General over the last 15 years under the General Assembly agenda item “developments in ICTs in the context of international security”.

Out of the previous five GGEs, three have resulted in consensus reports. These reports have been well-received by all UN Member States at the General Assembly, and in particular,
States have agreed that they should be guided in their use of ICTs by the 2015 GGE report [as set out in Resolution 70/237].

Therefore, you are not beginning your work in a vacuum, but rather building on a strong foundation of assessments and recommendations already made on:

1. Existing and emerging cyber threats;
2. The application of international law in the use of ICTs;
3. Voluntary norms of responsible State behaviour; and
4. A comprehensive set of measures for confidence-building and capacity-building.

Second, I would like to reflect on the composition of this GGE

During the process of establishing this GGE, the UN Secretariat received over 70 expressions of interest from Member States. In the end, only 25 could be chosen. In accordance with the Secretary-General’s mandate, we also aimed to ensure equitable gender balance in the Group. However, only 40% of GGE members are women.

Among the 70 expressions of interest, we received fewer than 13 female nominees for the GGE. A common reason provided for the nomination of male candidates is that there are no women at the appropriate level within national ministries. This is a reflection of the field of cyber security in general, where only 20% percent of those working in this area are women.\(^1\) In order to change this, including in the public sector, we need start now to encourage and promote equally qualified women in the field of cyber diplomacy.

Finally, let me reflect on the UN GGE and the Open-ended Working Group

As you know, this GGE carries out its work in parallel with an Open-ended Working Group comprising all Member States with a similar mandate, chaired by Ambassador Jürg Lauber of Switzerland.

From the perspective of the UN Secretariat, both processes add value to taking forward the global agenda. Interest from States is also high for both processes, as evidenced by the

---

\(^1\) [https://cybersecurityventures.com/women-in-cybersecurity/](https://cybersecurityventures.com/women-in-cybersecurity/)
attendance at first session of the OEWG and at the first informal consultations of the GGE held last week.

The GGE format is an important one. It allows a smaller group of experts on the specific topic – who are tasked to work in their personal rather than national capacities – to use their extensive expertise to provide in-depth assessments and recommendations for transmittal to the wider UN Membership for their consideration.

I fully agree with Ambassador Patriota that the two processes should be seen as a positive development.

While both processes have distinct mandates to fulfil, nothing prevents mutual exchanges between the GGE and the Open-ended Working Group. I am very heartened by the fact that both Chairs have already had several interactions and have attended several of the GGE regional consultations together.

In moving forward, I encourage GGE members to share their expertise also with the Open-ended Working Group by attending and participating actively in its meetings, but also by submitting working papers simultaneously to both, as some GGE members have already done.

Furthermore, since the current Open-ended Working Group completes its work almost a year earlier than the GGE, the GGE has the option of building upon the report of the Open-ended Working Group if it so wishes.

To conclude, each of you has been selected by the UN Secretary-General to “continue to study, with a view to promoting common understandings and effective implementation, possible cooperative measures to address existing and potential threats in the sphere of information security.”

Some of you have been engaged in this issue since the very first GGE, while for others, it is your first time in the Group. I believe that this balance ensures both wisdom and continuity as well as new and creative perspectives in your work.
I have tremendous faith in your expertise and great hope that your positive spirit, commitment and flexibility, under the very able guidance of the Chair, Ambassador Patriota, will enable this GGE to take forward the issue of international ICT security.

I wish you all a fruitful and successful GGE ahead.