First Committee  
20 October 2011  

Thematic statement on other disarmament measures and international security  

Statement by HE Mr Peter Woolcott  
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(Check against delivery)  

Mr Chairman,  

Australia, like all other Member States, has a growing interest in cyberspace as a vital platform for commercial, intellectual and social exchange.  

Australia supports the commencement of an international dialogue on the development of international norms for cyber. Such a dialogue is needed; the current international consideration of cyber issues lacks coherence.  

Admittedly, this type of dialogue is difficult to have in the United Nations framework, because the topic, in its many different dimensions, does not fit readily into the UNGA’s Committee structure. Cyberspace covers a range of issues, only some of which relate to international security and the First Committee’s work.  

We all know that developing international norms is a long-term enterprise. We expect the task of developing international norms for cyberspace to be particularly challenging.  

We need a balanced and pragmatic discussion which separates out the many different cyber issues and identifies an appropriate international path for each of them within the UN system. Australia considers that this is possible.
Mr Chairman,

Australia takes this opportunity to set out clearly some of our principles on cyber issues. Australia's starting point is that existing international law, including laws relating to the use of force and international humanitarian law, applies to the international security aspects of cyberspace. This body of law cannot be ignored; it needs to be built upon and elaborated as it relates to cyber.

Secondly, many of the concepts and terms used in relation to this issue are unclear or not readily or easily understood. A common understanding between Member States is necessary for a meaningful dialogue. There is clearly a need to do much, very basic work in this area.

Thirdly, Australia supports the existing multi-stakeholder governance framework for the internet and does not support control of the internet by governments. The private sector, which built and owns much of the internet, is critical to its continuing success.

Lastly, Australia is committed to freedom of speech and freedom of expression. These are rights protected under international human rights law. Great care needs to be taken in seeking to qualify such rights by reference to national laws of individual states.

Mr Chairman,

As we have said, an international dialogue can help clarify what needs to be done by the international community to develop norms for cyberspace. For that reason, Australia looks forward to the International Conference on Cyberspace in London in November which we hope will help set an international agenda on cyber. Australia also hopes that the Group of Governmental Experts to be established in 2012 under resolution 65/41 can further contribute to this issue in ways which build upon the consensus established by the 2010 GGE report.