General statement in connection with action on draft resolution A/C.1/71/L.17 "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security"

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to make the following general statement with regard to draft resolution LA5 entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security". This statement is made on behalf of Austria, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Tunisia and my own country, Sweden.

We will join the consensus on this draft resolution, and would like to underline some relevant aspects in this context.

International deliberations on cyberspace issues and the use of ICTs in an international security context need to continue to evolve as we seek greater common understanding globally. The adoption in July 2015 of the report by the fourth UN Group of Governmental Experts (UN GGE) on ICT issues was an important development in this regard. We also welcome the work started in August this year of the new Group of Governmental Experts and emphasize the importance of constructive and cooperative work within this forum. UN GGE reports remain the leading reference that sets out norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace.

The GGE report from 2015 made a significant contribution towards developing common understandings with regard to norms of responsible behaviour by states, confidence building measures, capacity-building, and the application of international law to the use of ICTs by states. We welcome the adoption by consensus of this report. We also encourage states to continue to build upon this important body of work while taking certain crucial principles and concepts fully into account. One example of such work is the adoption of a new set of OSCE confidence building measures in March 2016, building on the principles laid out in the 2015 GGE report.

Our delegations believe it is crucial that the internet remain open, free, equal and secure, thereby facilitating a free flow of information in cyberspace. The same rights that individuals have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and the right to privacy. Careful consideration must be paid in balancing fundamental human rights including the freedom of speech, and the restriction of the use of the Internet by terrorists, if the latter is necessary. The exercise of the right to privacy is important for the realization of the right to freedom of expression and to hold opinions without interference as well as for the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and is a foundation of a democratic society. Hence, we therefore welcome consensus resolution 20/8 at the 20th session of the UN Human Rights Council in 2012, which affirms this basic understanding. Follow-up resolutions (26/13, 28/116, 32/20) were adopted in the Human Rights Council without a vote on 20 June 2014, 24 March 2015 and 1 July 2016.

Reaffirming the main messages from the 2012 resolution, they also include important additions on the importance of internet access for global development and the SDG goals as well as the need to have a comprehensive human rights based approach to provide and expand access to the Internet. This year, the Human Rights Council requests the High Commissioner to prepare a report on ways to bridge digital divides between and within countries, including between women and men.