Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for inviting me to inform this Committee about the work of the United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Information and Communication Technology in the Context of International Security — the GGE. I would like to emphasize that these remarks reflect my personal impression of contributions and exchanges so far. They do not prejudge the eventual outcome of the group’s deliberations.

While discussions of the GGE are confidential, the UN High Representative for Disarmament has encouraged outreach to States not represented in the Group, in order to be able to reflect the interests and concerns of the wider UN membership. In this spirit, I particularly appreciate the opportunity for today’s exchange.

The GGE met for its first round of discussions from 29 August through 2 September in New York. 24 countries had been invited to nominate experts: Australia, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mexico, the Netherlands, Korea, Senegal, Serbia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States.


The mandate of the Group, as formulated by the General Assembly in OP 5 of its Resolution 70/237) is “(...) to study, with a view to promoting
common understandings, existing and potential threats in the sphere of information security and possible cooperative measures to address them and how international law applies to the use of information and communications technologies by States, as well as norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour of States, confidence-building measures and capacity-building …, and to submit a report on the results of the study to the General Assembly at its seventy-second session (…)"

In their first round of discussions, the members of the new GGE overwhelmingly showed a desire to "deepen" what had been achieved in the past. Analyses given in previous reports remain valid. The experts wished to make their report more action-oriented, and to contribute to universalizing the recommendations of the GGE.

There was widespread agreement that the focus of the group should lie on State behavior that presents a threat to international peace and security.

Turning to individual elements of the GGE's mandate:

Looking at international law, experts confirmed the distinction between international law and norms, rules, and principles of responsible State behavior that had made in the 2015 GGE report. They noted that the recommendations in that report were the result of careful discussion and reflect existing international law. Experts discussed -- among numerous other issues -- sovereignty and jurisdiction, as well as States’ right to respond to internationally wrongful acts committed by means of ICT.

Concerning non-binding norms, rules, and principles for the responsible behavior of States in the use of ICT, experts agreed on their politically stabilizing potential. They suggested elaborating on the norms presented by the GGE in 2015 and, in particular, clarifying where these actually address an obligation on States under international law. There
was some discussion on how to promote norm adherence, as well as ideas for additional norms.

Turning to confidence-building measures, experts suggested implementing first CBMs that are easy to realize, such as transparency-building measures, including on cyber incident response schemes, but also on structures and doctrines concerning State use of ICT. Experts felt that CBMs were best pursued at a regional level, but saw utility in cross-regional cooperation on confidence-building. They noted the need for political sensitization, training and capacity-building. A mechanism linking engagement in confidence-building to assistance in mitigating the effects of ICT incidents might be helpful.

The GGE had an in-depth and rich debate on cyber-security capacity building. Experts commented on the relationship between capacity-building and international peace and security in the context of State use of ICT. They remarked that capacity-building should reflect national ownership. It was not a one-time event, but a process, and should aim at being mutually beneficial. Noting that capacity-building could take place in a wide variety of formats and forums, experts suggested involving a wide variety of stakeholders in such activities, including the local IT industry. There were remarks about the cost associated with ICT security, noting that an appropriate level of ICT security was in the security interest of the wider international community. Given that many actors were offering ICT security training, experts saw a need for avoiding unnecessary duplication and for coordination. They saw an important role for the United Nations.

Looking at future work, experts discussed criteria that might help formulate ideas. They felt a need for inclusiveness, transparency, and balance, but also for ensuring the continued opportunity for expert
discussion, as well as a need for ensuring the legitimacy of work on State use of ICT in the context of international peace and security. The need for monitoring the implementation of already agreed norms and CBMs was also discussed.

The next round of GGE discussions will be held 28 November through 2 December in Geneva. There will be further meetings in Geneva in March and in New York in June 2017.

Mr. Chairman,

On the basis of the first week's discussions, as well as written input received from a number of experts, I am confident that we all desire to build further on the consensus achieved by previous GGEs, and to make a contribution to the work of the United Nations on State use of ICT in the context of international peace and security.

I thank the members of this Committee for their attention. I will try my best to answer any questions that may have arisen.