Statement of Estonia

UN General Assembly 72, Session First Committee

Thematic Discussion on Other Disarmament Measures and International Security

New York, 23 October 2017

Mr. Chairman,

Aligning ourselves fully with the statement made by the European Union, we would like to highlight some specific issues to which Estonia attaches particular importance.

Estonia recognizes that the security in the cyber world has become a very important issue in the context of wider international security. The role and involvement of the UN is getting therefore increasingly relevant. We believe it is necessary to raise the awareness of all United Nations members regarding the nature and importance of cyber security as an issue that affects the entire world. Estonia emphasizes that simultaneously with the discussion on the Internet security, the same amount of attention should be dedicated to the freedom of expression on the Internet. The Internet must be both secure AND free.

Cyberspace brings up a whole set of new and very important issues, such as the application of international law and what constitutes a responsible state behavior. On four occasions, Estonia has been part of the UN GGE on the Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunication in the Context of International Security. We value highly the work done so far and are proud to have contributed with the participation of our high-level expert H.E. Ms Marina Kaljurand.

We participated in the work of the GGE with a view to achieve a consensus report that would be both ambitious and comprehensive. We were ready to discuss all different positions and wording proposals. It is regretful that the GGE did not achieve a report in 2017 and could not make any further progress in analyzing how international law applies to the use of ICTs, particularly the principle of due diligence, non-forcible countermeasures, potential application of the right to self-defense and International Humanitarian Law. At the same time we would like to recognize that significant progress was made in the chapters concerning new threats, CBMs, capacity building and norms of responsible behavior. We should not ignore that and we strongly suggest to continue discussions in appropriate forums.
It is our view, that all in all the GGE has been a productive format. We already have reached consensus on a number of recommendations, which the General Assembly has repeatedly endorsed. It is our task as States to fully implement them.

For Estonia, international law is the most prominent authority, including for the use of ICTs. We therefore strive for clarity and certainty of norms as it not only reduces the risk of intolerable practices, but provides transparency and predictability of behavior that allows us to focus on peace. The fact that international law, in particular UN Charter in its entirety, applies to cyber was agreed in 2013 and reconfirmed in 2015. This is a very principal agreement and we would once again like to reiterate its significance and validity. No one should ever doubt it.

Estonia fully supports the establishment of a strategic framework for conflict prevention and stability in cyberspace that is based on international law, in particular the UN Charter, the development and implementation of universal norms of responsible state behavior, and regional confidence building measures and capacity building. We must continue our efforts, together with the work being done in the OSCE, with the aim to increase transparency and build confidence in this realm.

The EU Framework for a Joint EU Diplomatic Response to Malicious Cyber Activities not only contributes to conflict prevention, but constitutes an important step towards increased stability in cyberspace by bolstering the prevention, signaling and reactive capacities.

Current diplomatic efforts and operational actions, such as supporting wider respect for the existing legal instruments such as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime will continue unabated. The Council of Europe Convention on cybercrime is another useful tool at our disposal, helping to mitigate threats and minimize tensions arising from the emergence in this field. We call upon all states, which have not yet done so to accede to this convention.

Given the challenges, we are facing individually and collectively, it is extremely important to continue making efforts for concrete and tangible results.

I thank you, Mr Chair.