STATEMENT
BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION
TO THE FIRST COMMITTEE OF THE 72ND SESSION
OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY
VLADIMIR YERMAKOV
IN THE FIRST COMMITTEE ON
“OTHER DISARMAMENT MEASURES
AND INTERNATIONAL SECURITY” CLUSTER

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Mr. Chairman,

The threats in the digital field today are among the most serious challenges to international peace and security. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) become to be used more often as an instrument of political and military pressure, interference in domestic affairs of states and economic damage. The information arms race is gaining momentum. Information crime is on the rise while seemingly profit-motivated crimes are often used as a cover-up for the attempts to achieve political objectives.

Against this unfavorable background the role of discussion on international information security (IIS) in the United Nations is of paramount importance.

We are proud to say that it was Russia who first raised the issue of IIS in the United Nations. Back in 1998 we first introduced to the General Assembly the resolution “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security”. This document has been adopted by consensus for almost two decades. Last year more than 80 countries became its co-sponsors. I would like to thank all our traditional co-sponsors for their continuous support of the Russian initiative.

The UN GGEs on IIS have done productive work, including twice under the Russian chairmanship.

Unfortunately, recently multilateral dialogue on the IIS has been stumbling. Particularly, the 2016-2017 UN GGE on IIS was not able to reach a consensus.

In our view the reason lies in the fundamental political disagreements among the participants concerning their visions of the future of the global information space and the rules of the game by which it will be regulated.

From the very beginning, when the IIS only appeared as an issue on the international agenda, Russia stands for the maintenance of peace in the information
space, prevention of conflicts and aversion of the information "arms race." Our position is based of the firm belief that under no circumstances should the information space become yet another battlefield.

We proceed from an assumption that a just and equitable world order for all the states irrespectively of their technological capacities should be established in this area. The most vulnerable players should be protected from any types of aggression and pressure in the information space rather than become a target for stronger ones.

For Russia, as well as for the majority of the UN Member states, it is important to enshrine in the digital sphere the principles of non-use of force, respect of state sovereignty, non-interference into domestic affairs of other states and respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Conscious of the growing demand of the international community, Russia together with a broad range of like-minded countries from all regions has repeatedly suggested that the UN GGEs on IIS should develop and recommend for adoption by the UNGA the universal rules of responsible behavior of states in the information space that would enshrine the above-mentioned principles.

The peace-oriented concept suggested by Russia has once again come in conflict with the position of certain states that seek to impose on the world their own game rules in the information space, which would only serve their own interests.

These rules are based on "the right of the strongest" and are designed to ensure in the information space the "free hands" for the «chosen ones», those with technological advantages. It is exactly this logic that is behind the ambition to universalize the well-know decisions adopted – I would like to stress it – within one region, one political military alliance rather than by universal consensus, that recognize the digital sphere as a new battle-ground where the "law of war" shall automatically apply.

The idea of total and unconditional applicability of the existing international law in the use of ICTs is a double bottomed concept. Its advocates totally ignore the
need to solve a whole range of crucial issues related to the specifics of ICTs: for instance, the attribution of a computer attack, the use of proxies who may even not know that the attack has been launched from their territory and many others.

In other words, it has been proposed to already implement now separate international legal norms including the right of self-defense arbitrarily, with no clear evidence of the "suspected" state involvement.

We are particularly concerned about the fact that the concept of countermeasures in the digital field, which, among other things, implies punishment of "undesirable" countries by sanctions bypassing the existing mechanisms, including the UN Security Council, is being imposed on the world.

Perhaps, in order to exclude from the IIS discussion the "inconvenient" opinion of many other states the policy has been launched to discredit the role of the UN in addressing the IIS issues. It has been proposed to substitute the UN with more "comfortable" regional platforms.

We have an impression that the real motive behind these steps is to build an international legal cover up for any forceful actions in the information space.

We regard this policy as dangerous and potentially compromising the security interests of other countries and undermining the task of maintaining peace in the information space.

However, we are well aware that under the present circumstances the refusal to pursue the IIS dialogue can lead to grave consequences for all. We firmly believe that the UN with its universal legitimacy shall remain the cornerstone of the international system, including IIS issues. There is no alternative to the UN now. UN is a unique platform where all countries are represented on equal basis. It a matter of principle to involve in the IIS discussion all states without exception. Any attempts to restrict this discussion by "club membership", to limit the number of those who was "granted access" to it are not only unfair by definition, but also can undermine the elaboration of universal solutions in this area by the international community.
To ensure sustainability of IIS negotiations in the UN the Russian Federation introduces a draft procedural UNGA decision to keep the item “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security” in its agenda for the 73rd session. This will allow us to continue the IIS discussion in 2018, which would serve the interests of all states.

We thank the countries, and they are more than 40 now, who co-sponsored our draft. Taking into consideration its significance, we call on all UN Member States to support it and become its co-sponsors.

We believe that we should use in the most efficient way the time left until the next UN General Assembly. In our view, the international negotiation efforts during this time should be aimed at elaboration and adoption of universal rules of behavior of states in the information space. These rules should enshrine the principles of respect of state sovereignty, non-use of force, non-interference into the domestic affairs of other states, respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms and equal rights of all states to participate in the Internet governance.

We are convinced that within next year there will be a chance to come up closely to UNGA decisions in this regard.