Statement by Estonia at the UN General Assembly 73nd Session First Committee

Thematic Discussion on Other Disarmament Measures and International Security

New York, 30 October 2018

Mr Chairman,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the First Committee on cyber issues related to International Security. Estonia aligns itself with the statements delivered on 26 October by the EU and Canada on behalf of a group of states.

As one of the most advanced digital societies, Estonia urges the Member States of the United Nations to continue discussions on norms of responsible state behavior, confidence and capacity building measures, and application of existing international law in cyberspace.

The modern fabric of our societies is digital technology. Essential services, transport, banking, energy and telecommunications services depend on the cyber resilience of the digital domain.

We are all dependent and intrinsically inter-linked by the information and communication technologies, which support our societies and economies. Estimates link a large portion of global GDP growth to the smooth functioning of the digital ecosystem. In developing and emerging economies, a 10 percentage point increase in fixed broadband penetration would increase GDP by 1.38%, according to a World Bank study.

However, this same technology has the potential to be misused and exploited for malicious purposes. It is well known that Estonia experienced the first cyber siege in history more than ten years ago, which we effectively mitigated. In recent years, the world has witnessed several global ransomware attacks that affected entire industrial sectors and cost some 800-900 millions dollars in lost revenue globally. We also have seen very targeted cyber operations that tried to weaken international institutions. These attacks have been attributed to state actors, which confirms the relevance of the UN debate today.

Nation states bear a special responsibility to use information and telecommunications technology to support international stability and security and to refrain from malicious activities in cyberspace.

The First Committee this autumn will have the task to decide how to proceed with a cyber norms discussion at the UN level. It is important to remind ourselves that our future work should be based on the already solid achievements by the previous Groups of Governmental
Experts in 2010, 2013 and 2015. These GGEs have achieved consensus and have listed a number of norms, rules and principles that should form a basis for further discussions under the First Committee. In addition to following the previous consensus reports, the future UN process should foresee an effective consultative mechanism for the wider UN membership, as well as with other stakeholders. The resolution draft put forward by the United States envisages a realistic continuation for the UN cyber norms process, which has the potential to bring results and move the issue forward. It also contains a solution for how countries can express their views on the application of international law in cyberspace.

Last, but not least, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that there is a need to raise awareness and understanding on both digital and cyber security issues among the larger UN community.

There is a growing demand for capacity building when it comes to e-governance and cyber security. Estonia has already been supporting developing countries and emerging economies to advance their digitalization and cyber security. Work has been started by many stakeholders to raise the capacities of countries, which require assistance to fight cyber threats and address cybercrime. I am glad to note the growing interest towards our Group of Friends of e-Governance and Cybersecurity in the UN that we have launched together with Singapore.

Estonia is going to release soon its new Cyber Security Strategy, where capacity building of global partners will have an important role in strengthening digital infrastructure, and for providing skills and training for e-governance and cyber security.

Mr Chairman, Your Excellencies,

I would like to conclude my remarks by stressing that it is imperative that we will continue the UN First Committee discussions on norms of responsible state behavior, international law and confidence building in a fruitful, consensus-based and forward-looking manner. We owe it to the future generations.

Thank you.