FACT SHEET

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FIELD OF INFORMATION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

The issue of information security has been on the UN agenda since the Russian Federation first introduced a draft resolution in 1998 on the subject in the First Committee of the UN General Assembly. It was adopted without a vote by the General Assembly as resolution 53/70. Since that time there have been annual resolutions calling for the views of UN Member States on the issue of information security.

Groups of Governmental Experts

There have been four Groups of Governmental Experts (GGEs) that have examined the existing and potential threats from the cyber-sphere and possible cooperative measures to address them.

The first 15-member Group was established in 2004 but did not agree on a substantive report. A procedural report of the Group’s work was published as UN document A/60/202. Disagreement among the experts emerged primarily over the question of the impact of developments in information and communications technologies (ICTs) on national security and military affairs. The second disagreement was over whether the discussion should address issues of information content or if it should focus only on information infrastructure.

The second 15-member Group was established in 2009. A successful GGE report was issued in 2010 (A/65/201). It recommended the following in its report:

- Dialogue on norms for State use of ICTs to reduce risk and protect critical infrastructure;
- Confidence-building and risk-reduction measures, including discussion of ICTs in conflict;
- Information exchanges on national legislation and ICT security strategies; and
- Capacity-building in less-developed countries.

A third Group met in 2012/2013 and its report (A/68/98*) was submitted to the UN General Assembly in June 2013. The Group agreed on the following:

- International law, in particular the UN Charter, is applicable to the cyber-sphere and is essential for an open, secure, peaceful and accessible ICT environment
- State sovereignty applies to States’ conduct of ICT-related activities and to their jurisdiction over ICT infrastructure within their territory.
- State efforts to address the security of ICTs must go hand-in-hand with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- States must not use proxies to commit internationally wrongful acts and must ensure that their territories are not used by non-State actors for unlawful use of ICTs.
- The UN should play an important role in promoting dialogue among Member States.

January 2017
In December 2013, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 68/243 in which it requested the Secretary-General to establish a new GGE that would report in 2015.

The new GGE, with 20 experts, held four meetings between July 2014 and June 2015 with Mr. Carlos Luís Dantas Coutinho Perez (Brazil) chairing the Group. The Group agreed on a substantive consensus report in June 2015 (A/70/174) on norms, rules or principles of the responsible behaviour of States in the cyber-sphere as well as confidence building measures, international cooperation and capacity building which could have wider application to all States. It also addresses how International Law applies to the use of information and communications technologies and also makes recommendations for future work.

Its findings include:

- In their use of ICTs, States must observe, among other principles of international law, State sovereignty, the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other States.
- Existing obligations under international law are applicable to State use of ICTs and States must comply with their obligations to respect and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- States must not use proxies to commit internationally wrongful acts using ICTs, and should seek to ensure that their territory is not used by non-State actors to commit such acts.
- The UN should play a leading role in promoting dialogue on the security of ICTs in their use by States, and in developing common understandings on the application of international law and norms, rules and principles for responsible State behaviour.

New GGE in 2016/17

On 23 December 2015, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted resolution 70/237 which welcomed the outcome of the 2014/2015 GGE and requested the Secretary-General to establish a new GGE that would report to the General Assembly in 2017. The Group held its first and second meetings in New York and Geneva respectively.

UN Office for Disarmament Affairs

The Office for Disarmament Affairs has provided substantive support to the expert Groups and has acted as the secretariat assisting in the preparation of the Group’s reports.

For more information: www.un.org/disarmament/topics/informationsecurity

“Few technologies have been as powerful as information and communications technologies (ICTs) in reshaping economies, societies and international relations. Cyberspace touches every aspect of our lives. The benefits are enormous, but these do not come without risk. Making cyberspace stable and secure can only be achieved through international cooperation, and the foundation of this cooperation must be international law and the principles of the UN Charter......Our efforts in this realm must uphold the global commitment to foster an open, safe and peaceful Internet. In that spirit, I commend this Report to the General Assembly and to a wide global audience as a crucial contribution to the vital effort to secure the ICT environment.”

Secretary-General’s foreword to the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security, June 2015

January 2017