The General Assembly First Committee
Disarmament & International Security

Purview of the General Assembly First Committee

The General Assembly First Committee addresses the disarmament of conventional weapons, weapons of mass destruction and related international security questions. The First Committee makes recommendations on the regulations of these weapons as they relate to international peace and security. The First Committee does not address legal issues surrounding weapons possession or control complex peace and security issues addressed by the Security Council. For more information concerning the purview of the United Nations General Assembly as a whole, see page 22.

Website: www.un.org/ga/first/index.shtml

Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security

Around the world, governments, businesses and private citizens increasingly rely on information and communication technologies (ICT) in almost every facet of life and work. As the world has globalized, so have ICT systems that connect people around the world at a low cost. Governments, including the defense sector, have often led the way in developing and making use of new ICT developments. This has created great opportunities to develop new, better capabilities and ease collaboration amongst allies, but it has also created a bevy of new risks. Government computer networks are increasingly the target of cyber-attacks, defense contractors and researchers in industries as diverse as medicine, robotics and energy are being targeted for industrial espionage via the internet. Independent researchers have also expressed concerns about attacks on national power grids and other infrastructure that relies on the internet and computer networks. The increasing pace of global access to the internet is only accelerating the evolution of these trends. As non-State actors work to breach States' firewalls to gain access to high-level information and state secrets, the importance of collaboration crystalizes. As a result, United Nations Member States are increasingly interested in international frameworks that can address or mitigate information security concerns.

At the United Nations, the issue of information and telecommunications has historically focused on the role of unified communications and the integration of telephone lines, wireless signals and computers; ICT enables users to access, store, transmit or manipulate information from remote locations. Additionally, the single unified system of cabling, signal distribution and management offers a large economic incentive by largely eliminating hardwired networks, such as telephone lines. While the United Nations and other regional or international groups began to focus on developments in ICT in the early- to mid-nineties, the General Assembly first addressed information security in 1998. General Assembly resolution 53/70 stated the importance of ICT, technological advancement and the sharing of information multilaterally. Calling for States to submit reports to the Secretary-General on their positions regarding ICT and the advisability of the international community setting standards against cyberterrorism and criminal activity; it was adopted by consensus.

Since 1998, the Secretary-General has issued annual reports to the General Assembly outlining the views of Member States on the issue; at times, States' contributions are so substantial that they are published as stand-alone documents outside the annual report. All parties acknowledge that the ever-expanding growth of information and telecommunications technology has created susceptibilities and new possibilities for cyber-security disruption. This has led to a United Nations-backed push to initiate multilateral discussions to update the international community on these new and growing issues; some of these discussions have produced agreements that continue to resonate in future discussions on ICT and its role in States' economic, civil and military systems.

Recently, attempts to fight the ongoing threat of cybercrime have been mainly conducted through international cooperation and at regional levels—such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Organization of American States, the Asia-Pacific Economic Forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum—and bilateral efforts between States. There have been various Groups of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, or GGEs, which have issued three successful reports; the latest report links issues of cyber-security to international law, including the United Nations Charter. This unprecedented action will help shape the conversation on cyber-security and ICT in the future, particularly around peace and security issues, but implications as well as cohesive action is undefined. Another meeting of the members of the GGE is scheduled for 2015; while the body remains active on the matter, it is unclear how they will further implement changes regarding ICT or international security.

There have been other attempts from other entities within the United Nations to address issues of information security and telecommunications. In 2011, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation States suggested an International Code of Conduct. This Code, viewed by many States as controversial, was not brought to the floor of the General Assembly. The General Assembly Third Committee has addressed the questions of cybercrime and privacy-related rights; two resolutions, passed in 2000 and 2001, focus on fighting the criminal misuse of information technologies. In 2013, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 68/167, stating there is a personal right to privacy in the digital age; this resolution emphasizes the responsibility of States to protect the individual's right to privacy online.

As States and regional groups continue to further their technological gains, and as information and telecommunications systems become integral on the international stage, it will be important for the United Nations to take this issue more seriously. The positive advancements connected to the proliferation of ICT cannot be understated. There are also security risks. The increasing accessibility of ICT has expanded the global stage, making it easier to recruit terrorists and fund terrorism. The group known as the Islamic State (IS) has a massive Internet presence, with social media often used as a recruiting technique. The growth of social media technologies has increased the non-State actor's ability to reach a huge audience: sophisticated multimedia campaigns sway Westerns to the cause for funding or

fighting. The humanization of the jihadist experience has coerced thousands of Westerners to flock to IS, either on-the-ground in the Middle East or through terror activities at home.

Cyber-attacks on both governmental and non-governmental networks are also an increasing problem. In 2010, researchers identified the Stuxnet virus, which was later revealed to be designed to damage Iranian nuclear centrifuges by interfering with Siemens industrial logic controllers. While no actor has claimed credit for the attack, media reports widely attribute its development to the United States of America and Israel. In the summer of 2015, the United States alleged that the People's Republic of China was responsible for a major hack that stole millions of United States government personnel records. Such records would be incredibly valuable for any intelligence agency. Non-State actors have also been active in major attacks against government websites and networks around the world.

The increases in cybercrime and State-sponsored cyber-warfare highlight the importance of this issue. Attacks on government computers and systems, sometimes hidden behind the smokescreen of hacker groups, have elevated the role of States--either in their alleged complicity or their relatively inactive response. States must work multilaterally to combat these detriments to information and telecommunications so technology can continue to positively impact global development and reshape the world as we know it.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:
- What actions should Member States and the international community take to prevent attacks via information and telecommunication systems?
- What activities conducted online should be considered intelligence-gathering and which should be considered acts of war or sabotage? What conduct is acceptable in this domain?
- How can Member States protect against cyber-attacks by non-State actors?

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION, STOCKPILING AND USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

Chemical weapons were first used in World War I, when the German Empire opened canisters of chlorine gas and allowed the wind to move the gas over French lines. As the war progressed, both sides developed and used artillery shells to deliver chemical weapons, including chlorine, phosgene and mustard gases, which resulted in approximately 1.3 million casualties. In 1925, the Geneva Protocol was signed into international law, banning the use of chemical weapons in warfare, but not their production or stockpiling. Despite widespread international prohibitions on their use, chemical weapons saw use again in World War II.

Outside of the two World Wars, State actors were responsible for chemical weapons use in a variety of instances: Italy used mustard gas during its 1935 invasion of Ethiopia and Japan employed chemical warfare against China starting in 1938. The issue returned to the forefront of public discussion in 1980, during the Iran-Iraq War, when Iraq used mustard gas against Iranian troops and Kurdish civilians.

These events demonstrated a clear need for a new international agreement on the development, production, stockpiling and use of Chemical Weapons. In 1992, the United Nations began drafting a new Convention. The Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (CWC) came into force in 1997 and was designed to address some of the shortcomings of the Geneva Protocol. The CWC prohibits the use, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons, a step further than the Geneva Convention. The CWC calls for the destruction of all chemical weapons, including those abandoned outside State parties' territory, and the destruction or conversion of chemical weapons production facilities. The CWC is also supported by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the independent and autonomous international organization working to ensure CWC implementation through demilitarization, non-proliferation, and national and international implementation.

Three reviews of the Convention have been held since its enactment: 2003, 2008 and 2013. As of the third review, only eight Member States had not assented to the Convention and almost 80 percent of all declared chemical weapons held by signatories have been destroyed. Only three nations, Libya, the Russian Federation and the United States,

still hold chemical weapon stockpiles. Additionally, an unde-termined number of production facilities remain undestroyed or unconverted.

In 2013, numerous media reports alleged that the government of the Syrian Arab Republic had used chemical weapons in the Syrian civil war. A United Nations investigation confirmed the use of sarin in an August 2015 attack in Ghouta. Both the Syrian government and opposition forces blame the other for its use. In December 2013, the Syrian Arab Republic, under intense international pressure, ratified the Convention. As of December 2014, 98 percent of all Syrian stockpiles had been destroyed.

Much work still remains to be done in achieving full implementation of the Convention. Of the States Parties, three still have chemical weapons to be destroyed. The Russian Federation has committed to an extended timeline for the complete destruction of remaining chemical weapons by 31 December 2015, while 90 percent of the United States' stockpiles have been destroyed. In the interest of public health and environmental concerns, the remaining stockpiles in the United States are to be chemi-cally neutralized; as such, no definite timeline has been established for complete destruction.

The Convention also calls on ratifying parties to adopt legislation echo-ing the tenets of the Convention to prohibit the development and pro-duction of chemical weapons. Of those States that have ratified, 97 have yet to draft and enact such legislation. National legislation is intended as an enforcement mechanism that can curtail the acquisition and use of chemical weapons by non-State actors. Additionally, many chemical weapons production facilities are as-of-yet still standing or have not been converted for non-chemical-weapons purposes.

These remaining concerns will prompt further action, including the monitoring of former chemical weapons production facilities to ensure their disuse or conversion. With only three States representing 20.1 percent of the pre-Convention stockpiles, the progress of those States that have not yet met their obligation to destroy remaining chemical weapons must continue to be observed. Unwillingness or inability to finance disarmament, coupled with the inability to destroy or convert chemical weapons or facilities on an accelerated timeline, continues to plague those States who have yet to sign the Convention. Regional con-flict could also preclude the destruction of chemical weapons stockpiles within the Member State or by non-State actors. This may also validate a need for exceptions to the provisions of the Convention on a case-by-case basis.

Questions to consider from your government's perspective on this issue include the following:
- What are the barriers to achieving full ratification of the Convention?
- How can the international community ensure that existing chem-ical weapons stockpiles are eliminated?
- How can the United Nations and the international community prevent the acquisition and use of chemical weapons by non-state actors?

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