United Nations

A/RES/78/16

General Assembly

Distr.: General
6 December 2023

Seventy-eighth session
Agenda item 94
Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 4 December 2023

[*on the report of the First Committee (A/78/404, para. 14)*]

78/16. Programme of action to advance responsible State behaviour in the use of information and communications technologies in the context of international security

The General Assembly,

Recalling its resolutions 43/78 H of 7 December 1988, 53/70 of 4 December 1998, 54/49 of 1 December 1999, 55/28 of 20 November 2000, 56/19 of 29 November 2001, 57/53 of 22 November 2002, 58/32 of 8 December 2003, 59/61 of 3 December 2004, 60/45 of 8 December 2005, 61/54 of 6 December 2006, 62/17 of 5 December 2007, 63/37 of 2 December 2008, 64/25 of 2 December 2009, 65/41 of 8 December 2010, 66/24 of 2 December 2011, 67/27 of 3 December 2012, 68/243 of 27 December 2013, 69/28 of 2 December 2014, 70/237 of 23 December 2015, 71/28 of 5 December 2016, 73/27 of 5 December 2018, 73/266 of 22 December 2018, 74/28 and 74/29 of 12 December 2019, 75/32 of 7 December 2020, 75/240 of 31 December 2020, 76/19 of 6 December 2021 and 77/37 of 7 December 2022,

Noting that considerable progress has been achieved in developing and applying the latest information technologies and means of telecommunication,

Expressing concern that information technologies and means of telecommunication can potentially be used for purposes that are inconsistent with the objectives of maintaining international stability and security, to the detriment of security in both civil and military fields,

Expressing concern also about malicious information and communications technology activities aimed at critical infrastructure and critical information infrastructure facilities supporting essential services to the public,

Considering that it is necessary to prevent the use of information resources or technologies for criminal or terrorist purposes, *Stressing* that it is in the interest of all States to seek the settlement of disputes by peaceful means, and to promote the use of information and communications technologies for peaceful purposes and to prevent conflicts arising from the use of information and communications technologies,

Underlining the importance of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the use of information and communications technologies while bridging digital divides, building resilience in every society and sector and maintaining a human-centric approach,

Calling upon Member States to be guided in their use of information and communications technologies by the assessments and recommendations of the 2010, 2013, 2015 and 2021 groups of governmental experts, as well as those of the 2021 Open-ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, and the first[1] and second[2] annual progress reports of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, in particular the cumulative and evolving framework for responsible State behaviour in the use of information and communications technologies elaborated and adopted by consensus through these processes,

Recalling the conclusion of the groups of governmental experts and the 2021 Open-ended Working Group that international law, and in particular the Charter of the United Nations, is applicable and essential to maintaining peace and stability and promoting an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful information and communications technology environment,

Reaffirming that voluntary, non-binding norms of responsible State behaviour in the use of information and communications technologies can reduce risks to international peace, security and stability, and do not seek to limit or prohibit action that is otherwise consistent with international law but nonetheless to set standards for responsible State behaviour, while also reaffirming that, given the unique attributes of information and communications technologies, additional norms could be developed over time and, separately, noting the possibility of future elaboration of additional binding obligations, if appropriate,

Recalling that confidence-building measures in the field of information and communications technology security can contribute to preventing conflicts, avoiding misperceptions, misunderstandings and the reduction of tensions, and that regional and subregional organizations have made significant efforts in developing confidence-building measures, and welcoming the establishment of a global intergovernmental directory of points of contact as a confidence-building measure,

Supporting the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, underlining the complementarity of the proposal for a programme of action with the work of the current 2021–2025 open-ended working group, and reaffirming that the programme of action is to take into account the consensus outcomes adopted by the 2021–2025 open-ended working group,

Reaffirming that any future mechanism for regular institutional dialogue under the auspices of the United Nations should be an action-oriented process with specific objectives, building on previous outcomes, and be inclusive, transparent, consensus-driven and results-based,

[1] See A/77/275.

[2] See A/78/265.

Recognizing the utility of exploring mechanisms dedicated to following up on the implementation of the agreed norms and rules as well as the development of further ones,

Stressing the urgent need to assist States in their efforts to implement the framework for responsible State behaviour and tackle emerging threats in the information and communications technology environment, and, in this context, that capacity-building is essential for cooperation of States and confidence-building in the field of information and communications technology security, and that capacity-building in relation to State use of information and communications technologies in the context of international security should be guided by the principles for capacity-building included in the final report of the 2021 Open-ended Working Group[3] and by the first and second annual progress reports of the 2021–2025 open-ended working group,

Underlining that a holistic approach to capacity-building in the context of information and communications technology security is essential and that, in order to bridge the digital divide, sustainable, effective and affordable connectivity solutions, particularly for developing States, are necessary,

Emphasizing the value of further strengthening collaboration, when appropriate, with civil society, the private sector, academia and the technical community, to strengthen security and stability in the information and communications technology environment,

Underlining the importance of narrowing the "gender digital divide" and of promoting the full, equal and meaningful participation and leadership of women in decision-making processes related to the use of information and communications technologies in the context of international security,

Welcoming the consensus recommendations of the second annual progress report of the 2021–2025 open-ended working group, including on the common elements for a future mechanism for regular institutional dialogue and its call for States to engage in discussions on the scope, structure and content of the programme of action at the sixth, seventh and eighth substantive sessions of the open-ended working group,

Recalling that the proposed United Nations programme of action to advance responsible State behaviour in the use of information and communications technologies in the context of international security is conceived as a permanent, inclusive, action-oriented mechanism to discuss existing and potential threats, to support States' capacities and efforts to implement and advance commitments to be guided by the framework for responsible State behaviour, to discuss and further develop, if appropriate, this framework, to promote engagement and cooperation with relevant stakeholders, and to periodically review the progress made in the implementation of the programme of action as well as the programme's future work,

Highlighting the conclusions contained in the report of the Secretary-General submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/37,[4] including on the normative framework for responsible State behaviour, underpinned by a universal affirmation of the applicability of international law and a commitment to confidence-building and capacity-building, which represents a significant milestone in international cooperation towards an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful information and communications technology environment and must serve as a baseline for all future multilateral work in this area, highlighting also that inclusive and transparent

[3] See A/75/816.

[4] A/78/76.

consideration of proposals for action-oriented mechanisms to advance implementation of the universally endorsed normative framework, and to support State capacities in implementing it, including through capacity-building, is most welcome, and highlighting further that the 2021–2025 open-ended working group should play a key role in further work on the programme of action, including by holding dedicated intersessional meetings in both 2024 and 2025 to ensure that all positions are heard,

1. *Welcomes* the report on the proposal for a United Nations programme of action to advance responsible State behaviour in the use of information and communications technologies in the context of international security, prepared by the Secretary-General on the basis of the views expressed by States, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/37, including the observations and conclusions of the Secretary-General contained in the report;

2. *Also welcomes* the regional consultations convened by the Office of Disarmament Affairs of the Secretariat with relevant regional organizations to share views on the programme of action;

3. *Encourages* States to discuss and provide recommendations on the scope, structure and content of the programme of action, and the modalities for its establishment, through the discussions on regular institutional dialogue at the sixth, seventh and eighth sessions of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, as well as dedicated intersessional meetings, including on how the programme of action would:

(a) Support States, including through capacity-building, in the implementation of the framework for responsible State behaviour, which includes international law, norms, rules and principles for responsible State behaviour, and confidence-building measures;

(b) Enable discussions on the further development of the framework, including by deepening common understandings on the norms and on how existing international law applies in the use of information and communications technologies, identifying any gaps in those understandings and, if appropriate, considering the need for additional voluntary, non-binding norms or additional legally binding obligations;

(c) Facilitate inclusive dialogue and cooperation, including with relevant stakeholders where appropriate;

4. *Decides* to establish a mechanism under the auspices of the United Nations, upon the conclusion of the 2021–2025 open-ended working group and no later than 2026, that will be permanent, inclusive and action-oriented, with the specific objectives affirmed in General Assembly resolution 77/37 and with the common elements for future regular institutional dialogue agreed by consensus in the 2023 annual progress report of the 2021–2025 open-ended working group, and also decides that the scope, structure, content and modalities of this mechanism shall be based on consensus outcomes of the 2021–2025 open-ended working group, taking into account the report of the Secretary-General prepared pursuant to resolution 77/37, the views submitted by States therein, the regional consultations as well as dialogue with relevant stakeholders;

5. *Also decides* to include in the provisional agenda of its seventy-ninth session the item entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security".

42nd plenary meeting
4 December 2023