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Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025

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Initial report outlining the proposal for the development and operationalization of a United Nations voluntary fund to support the capacity-building of States on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies

Paper by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

1. In the annex to its third annual progress report ([A/79/214](#)), the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies recommended that States further study the establishment of a United Nations voluntary fund, maximally leveraging existing initiatives, to support the capacity-building of States on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies (ICT). The open-ended working group agreed that the fund would, inter alia, facilitate the participation of national representatives and experts, particularly from developing countries, at relevant meetings under the future permanent mechanism on ICT security in the context of international security, as well as other goals identified by States.¹

2. Furthermore, also in that annex, the working group requested the Secretariat to prepare, for consideration by the working group, an initial report outlining a proposal for the development and operationalization of a voluntary fund for consideration by States, to be considered by the working group at its tenth substantive session, in March 2025, with a view to reaching a consensus recommendation on these details by July 2025 for operationalization under the auspices of the future permanent mechanism.

3. In preparing the aforementioned report, the Secretariat was requested to address, inter alia, issues related to the identification of an appropriate manager for the fund; financial and administrative requirements; eligibility and access by potential

¹ See [A/79/214](#), annex, para. 54.



beneficiaries to the fund; monitoring and evaluation; and how the ICT security capacity-building principles would be mainstreamed into the implementation of the fund. The Secretariat was further requested to seek to achieve complementarities and avoid duplication with existing initiatives, and work on the basis that this fund may receive funding through public, private and philanthropic sources.

4. The present report is submitted pursuant to above-mentioned requests and without prejudice to the ongoing consideration by States, through the working group, of the potential establishment and operationalization of a voluntary fund.

II. Background information

5. In the framework of the working group, States have continued in-depth discussions on ICT capacity-building in the context of international security, sharing national experiences on international cooperation and capacity-building, as well as ongoing bilateral, regional and global initiatives. They have reflected on existing opportunities, while identifying potential gaps, with a view to enhancing the capacity of all States to observe and implement the cumulative and evolving framework for responsible State behaviour in the use of ICT. There has been common agreement on the need to promote better understanding of the needs of developing States with the aim of narrowing the digital divide. With regards to types of capacity-building, States have underscored the pressing need to build capacity and good practices in a range of diplomatic, legal, policy, legislative and regulatory areas, in addition to technical skills, institution-building and cooperative mechanisms.

6. In the context of discussions on capacity-building, States have variously addressed the landscape of existing opportunities and initiatives with a view to avoiding duplication and leveraging existing resources. In this regard, States have acknowledged the mapping exercise undertaken by the Secretariat to survey the landscape of capacity-building programmes and initiatives within and outside the United Nations and at the global and regional levels.² States have underscored that further coordination of capacity-building efforts in ICT security is required and that the United Nations could play an important role in such efforts.

7. States have continued to promote the mainstreaming of the principles of capacity-building in relation to State use of ICT in the context of international security, as contained in annex C to document [A/78/265](#) and first elaborated in the final report of the Open-ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security.³ By endorsing those principles, States have concluded that capacity-building should be a sustainable process – comprising specific results-based activities while also having a clear purpose – and be evidence-based, politically neutral, transparent, accountable and without conditions. Moreover, States have agreed that capacity-building should be undertaken with full respect for the principle of State sovereignty, be demand driven, correspond to nationally identified needs and priorities and respect human rights and fundamental freedoms. In its third progress report ([A/79/214](#)), the working group recalled and reaffirmed those principles and highlighted the need for further efforts to mainstream these principles into relevant capacity-building programming.

8. States have recognized there is an array of available funding avenues for ICT capacity-building in the context of international security. Nonetheless, it has also been agreed that additional mechanisms could be explored in the context of international security, under the auspices of a future permanent mechanism on ICT security. In that

² See [A/AC.292/2024/2](#).

³ See [A/75/816](#), annex I, para. 56.

context, States have considered the possibility of additional funding mechanisms to support States in related capacity-building.

III. Objectives and purpose

9. Without prejudice to future decisions of States in the framework of the working group, the envisaged voluntary fund would serve the following two principal purposes, in line with the description provided for in the third annual progress report:

(a) Facilitate the participation of national representatives and experts, particularly from developing countries, in relevant meetings of the future permanent mechanism on ICT security under the auspices of the United Nations;

(b) Support capacity-building activities for States in accordance with the objectives and purposes of the future permanent mechanism.

10. The voluntary fund would abide by the agreed principles of capacity-building in their entirety. In particular, all activities and initiatives would be carried out in an evidence-based, accountable and transparent manner in full respect of the principle of State sovereignty.⁴ In addition to the agreed principles, the following guiding characteristics would be prioritized:

(a) Needs based and demand driven, underpinned by the guiding concept of national ownership;

(b) Responsive to and aligned with the decisions of States in the framework of the future permanent mechanism, with a view to ensuring a peaceful and secure ICT security environment;

(c) Containing practical, results-oriented, specific and scalable assistance intended to support future, sustainable growth;

(d) Complementary to existing mechanisms, including funding vehicles provided by non-governmental stakeholders, regional and subregional organizations;

(e) Gender-sensitive and inclusive, with full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

11. In accordance with all applicable United Nations rules and regulations, all sensitive information would be handled appropriately. Any particular requirements related to confidentiality of sensitive information would be addressed as part of the project planning process and addressed accordingly.

12. States have affirmed the importance of broad engagement of all States in the working group to exchange views, provide diverse perspectives and identify areas of convergence and common understanding in support of ensuring an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful ICT environment. Facilitating the participation of national representatives and experts in future meetings of the future permanent mechanism would aim to support the broadest and most inclusive participation of States in the work of the future mechanism with due regard to geographic balance and gender equality.

13. As affirmed by States in the framework of the working group, all capacity-building activities and initiatives carried out through the proposed voluntary fund would support the cumulative and evolving framework for responsible State behaviour in the use of ICT in the context of international security, including implementation of the agreed norms of responsible State behaviour, the applicability

⁴ As agreed in the 2021 final report of the open-ended working group (see [A/75/816](#), para. 56).

of international law to State use of ICT and confidence-building measures. Emphasizing there is no one-size-fits-all solution to capacity-building, the initiatives supported by the proposed fund may include a range of activities, including transfer of knowledge, skills and technical assistance, on the basis of mutual agreement by respective donors and recipients. Intrinsically important to capacity-building activities is a State's evaluation of its own status of ICT security at the national level, which would allow for the identification of gaps and help to establish clear, achievable goals.

IV. Financial and administrative arrangements

14. The proposed United Nations voluntary fund would abide by all applicable United Nations financial rules and regulations.⁵ It would be funded through voluntary contributions from Member States and non-governmental entities, including philanthropic organizations and the private sector. Funding from non-governmental sources would comply with all related requirements of the United Nations. Requests for funding contributions would be made to all States and a broad array of relevant non-governmental entities, including through online announcements via relevant channels.

15. In the light of the subject matter, the Office for Disarmament Affairs would be a logical entity to serve as manager of the fund. However, additional human resources, including a Professional and a General Service post, within the Office for Disarmament Affairs would be required to ensure effective oversight and functioning of the fund and its activities. Based on similar experiences of managing voluntary funds of this nature, the Office for Disarmament Affairs could estimate additional resources in the form of a project manager (1 Professional post) to oversee the planning, execution and delivery of projects and general service staff (1 General Service post) to support financial transactions. A portion of the voluntary funds provided by Member States could be used to cover post-related costs. Such an arrangement has been adopted for the United Nations Trust Facility Supporting Cooperation on Arms Regulation. Alternatively, a regular budget provision could be initiated through the General Assembly budgeting process to secure required staffing resources such that the voluntary contributions to the fund would be directed only to the substantive activities of sponsorship and capacity-building activities.

16. The most practical means of establishing a new fund for the purposes described above would be a new funding facility within the existing Office for Disarmament Affairs trust fund for global and regional disarmament activities. A new funding mechanism could be established under that fund specifically designed to facilitate participation of national representatives and experts in future meetings of the regular mechanism and support other capacity-building activities and initiatives. The mechanism would be established upon the decision of States and become operational once a minimum ceiling of voluntary funds is received, which would be communicated by the fund manager in advance of the first call for funds to be circulated to States and related non-governmental entities.

17. All financial contributions to the proposed voluntary fund would be managed by the Office for Disarmament Affairs in accordance with United Nations financial rules and regulations. Information on voluntary contributions received would be made public, unless otherwise requested by the donor, on a dedicated webpage.

18. Decision-making related to the sponsorship of national representatives and experts would be undertaken by the fund manager, with final approval by the High

⁵ [ST/SGB/2013/4](#) and [ST/SGB/2013/4/AMEND.1](#).

Representative for Disarmament Affairs, on the basis of clearly defined criteria communicated in advance and at the time of solicitation of applications for sponsorship. It is advisable that selection of capacity-building activities also be undertaken by the fund manager, with final approval by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, on the basis of guidance provided by and consultation with a governance structure composed of both donor and beneficiary States. Further details on the structure would be elaborated in due course and on the basis of the final details of the fund to be decided by States.

19. Options for size and management of the voluntary fund under the Office for Disarmament Affairs would depend on the level of voluntary funding secured. To ensure the most effective functioning of the fund, earmarking of funds for specific activities would not be permissible.

20. The below is an estimation and provided only for illustrative purposes.

(a) Annual funding of \$2 million: small-scale operation providing sponsorship of 10 delegates twice yearly to attend United Nations meetings and an additional 1–3 capacity-building activities;

(b) Annual funding of \$5 million: medium-scale operation providing sponsorship of 20 delegates twice yearly to attend United Nations meetings and up to 10 capacity-building activities with the potential for multi-year commitments.

V. Eligibility criteria and access parameters

Sponsorship of delegates

21. The selection of sponsored national representatives and experts for participation in meetings of the future permanent mechanism could be based on the general following criteria:

(a) Applicants must be capital-based government officials currently working in the area of cyber/ICT security diplomacy, policy and/or a related technical area;

(b) Applicants must be able to demonstrate direct experience in cyber/ICT security-related matters in their current positions and the intention to contribute to United Nations-related discussions in the immediate future;

(c) Applicants must be available to travel and stay for the duration of the respective meeting;

(d) Applicants must attend all formal meetings of the respective meeting and participate in all capacity-building activities organized in conjunction with the formal sessions;

(e) If selected, applicants may be asked to share a report detailing their experiences with the fund manager.

22. The final selection of sponsored delegates would take into consideration both gender and geographic diversity. Applications from women candidates would be encouraged with a view to achieving the equal, full and effective participation of women in multilateral discussions on ICT security. While all States would be eligible to apply, in view of supporting the broadest and most inclusive participation of delegations to meetings of the future permanent mechanism, applications from the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States could be given priority.

Capacity-building activities

23. The scale and number of projects supported would depend on the available funding. No maximum cap would be set on activities, but a minimum funding capacity would be maintained to ensure quality and sustainability. This funding floor would be decided upon in due course on the basis of the final details of the fund to be decided by States.

24. Eligible recipients would be Governments. Governments may wish to cooperate with non-governmental entities, United Nations partners or other international/regional organizations as implementing partners. Implementing partners should be identified from the outset in the application.

25. Without prejudice to further details, which may be decided by States in the framework of the working group, the general criteria for selection of capacity-building activities could be as follows:

(a) National/regional needs assessment: identification of priority needs aligned with the cumulative and evolving framework of responsible State behaviour in the use of ICT;

(b) Synergies and gap analysis: demonstration of complementarity;

(c) Geographic balance: equitable distribution of funds across regions;

(d) Impact and sustainability: demonstration of potential for national/regional ownership and sustained intervention for lasting impact;

(e) Commitment: demonstration of active engagement in and commitment to the working group and successor processes;

(f) Gender mainstreaming: integration of gender perspectives into the respective activities and initiatives.

26. The proposed voluntary fund could focus on a range of areas aligned with the cumulative, evolving framework for responsible State behaviour in the use of ICT, including the following:

(a) Development of national strategies, laws and regulations;

(b) Elaboration of a national/regional position on the applicability of international law to State use of ICT;

(c) ICT incident management and response, including establishment of computer emergency response teams;

(d) Critical infrastructure and critical information infrastructure protection;

(e) ICT security awareness-raising and education;

(f) Training and workforce development;

(g) Implementation of the agreed norms of responsible State behaviour in the use of ICT;⁶

(h) National/regional implementation of the global voluntary confidence-building measures in the area of ICT security;⁷

(i) Participation in the Global Intergovernmental Points of Contact Directory.

⁶ See [A/79/214](#), annex A, Voluntary Checklist of Practical Actions for the implementation of voluntary, non-binding norms of responsible State behaviour in the use of ICTs.

⁷ See [A/78/265](#), annex B, and [A/79/214](#), annex B.

VI. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements

27. Monitoring and evaluation of all funded activities would be done in accordance with United Nations rules and regulations. A consolidated report produced annually for donors, summarizing the impact and results of funded activities, is recommended. Financial reporting would be done in the aggregate, indicating overall spending by the fund. That report would be made available publicly on the dedicated fund website in the spirit of transparency and inclusivity.

VII. Conclusions

28. The Office for Disarmament Affairs stands ready to operationalize the proposed United Nations voluntary fund should States decide to establish it. Drawing on its previous and ongoing experiences of managing disarmament-related funds, the Office for Disarmament Affairs could serve as manager of the fund overseeing its functioning in accordance with all applicable United Nations rules and regulations with the ultimate oversight provided by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs.

29. Establishment of the fund in close connection with the future permanent mechanism is advisable to ensure its sustainability and firm anchoring in the intergovernmental process expected to address all related matters of ICT security. It would be equally important to ensure that the proposed voluntary fund aligns well with the substantive priorities set by States through the future permanent mechanism.

30. To ensure an efficient and effective establishment, should States decide to proceed with this proposal, it is critical for States to provide maximum clarity on the details of operation of the fund, including on State preferences for priority areas of capacity-building activities and prioritization criteria for sponsored national representatives and experts.

31. Upon further discussion and the decisions of States, the Office for Disarmament Affairs would be at the disposal of States to provide an updated briefing on proposed operational modalities of the voluntary fund.
