Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025
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Background information paper on global points of contact directory

Paper by the Secretariat

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 75/240, the General Assembly decided to convene, starting from 2021, under the auspices of the United Nations, a new open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, acting on a consensus basis.

2. The Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025 held its organizational session on 1 June 2021, its first substantive session from 13 to 17 December 2021, its second substantive session from 28 March to 1 April 2022 and its third substantive session from 25 to 29 July 2022, at United Nations Headquarters. To maintain momentum and build on the progress made, the Chair of the working group, Mr. Burhan Gafoor (Singapore), convened a series of informal, inter-sessional meetings from 5 to 9 December 2022 at United Nations Headquarters.

3. At its third substantive session, on 29 July 2022, the working group adopted its draft report as contained in A/AC.292/2022/L.1 and decided to include in its report the outcome of its substantive discussions as an annex.

4. The first annual report of the working group, including the annexed progress report of its substantive discussions, was issued on 8 August 2022 as document A/77/275. A compendium of statements in explanation of position on the report was issued as document A/AC.292/2022/INF/4.

5. By paragraph 3 of “Recommended next steps” under Section E “Confidence-Building Measures” of the Annex “Progress report on the discussions of the working group on agenda item 5” contained in A/77/275:

“The UN Secretariat is requested to seek views from States on the global points of contact directory, which could include views on experiences at the regional and subregional levels, and produce a background information paper on these views by the end of January 2023 for consideration at the fourth session of the OEWG”.

6. Pursuant to this request of the Open-ended working group, on 30 August 2022, the Office for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat disseminated a Note Verbale seeking the views of States on the global points of contact directory with a deadline for submission of views of 25 November 2022. A deadline extension was subsequently granted until 30 December 2022.

7. As of 30 December 2022, the following States submitted views on the global points of contact directory: Armenia, Austria, China, Colombia, Czechia, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain and United Kingdom.

8. All views received from States are available in full on the webpage of the Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021-2025 in the original languages received (https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/57871)

9. The present background information paper, based on the views received from States, is submitted pursuant to the request contained in the annex of document A/77/275. Pursuant to the request of the working group, the Secretariat is providing this background information paper for the further consideration of States and without prejudice to their individuals views or to future discussions in and decisions of the open-ended working group.

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1 A/AC.292/2021/1, Provisional agenda and annotations
2 Pursuant to the request of the working group, the Secretariat is providing this background information paper for the further consideration of States and without prejudice to their individuals views or to future discussions in and decisions of the open-ended working group.
with the inputs received from States as it provides a summation of the key points and views expressed rather than a verbatim compilation of views.

II. Decision to establish and previous discussions of the global point of contact directory

10. Through the first annual progress report of the Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021-2025 (A/77/275), States agreed to establish, building on work already done at the regional level, a global, intergovernmental, points of contact directory. States also agreed to engage in further focused discussions at the fourth and fifth sessions of the Open-ended working group on the development of such a directory, on a consensus basis, and to discuss initiatives related to capacity-building, taking into account available best practices such as regional and subregional experiences where appropriate.³

11. Prior to the above-mentioned decisions of the Open-ended working group, discussions among States on the establishment of a points of contact directory in the area of information and communications technologies security had been ongoing, namely in the framework of the first open-ended working group on the subject matter established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 73/27 and decision 75/550—Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security.

12. This predecessor working group discussed the viability of establishing a central global directory of points of contact, while noting that the security of such a directory as well as its operational modalities would be crucial to its effectiveness, as would avoiding duplicative or overly detailed arrangements. The value of conducting exercises among a network of points of contact was also emphasized with a view to maintaining readiness and responsiveness.⁴

13. The Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security concluded that establishing national points of contact is a confidence-building measure in itself, but also a helpful measure for the implementation of many other confidence-building measures and is invaluable in times of crisis. The working group recognized that States may find it useful to have points of contact for, inter alia, diplomatic, policy, legal and technical exchanges, as well as incident reporting and response.⁵ The working group encouraged States to consider the modalities of establishing a directory of Points of Contact at the global level.⁶

III. Guiding principles and overarching understandings

14. States have expressed broad agreement that establishment and subsequent operationalization of a global, intergovernmental points of contact directory would serve as a confidence-building measure and has the potential to support information exchange, including in times of crisis, and capacity-building. States have reaffirmed their support for the decision of the Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021-2025 in its first annual progress report to establish such a directory.

³ A/77/275, Annex, Section E, Recommended next steps.
⁴ A/75/816, paragraph 31.
⁵ Ibid, paragraph 47.
⁶ Ibid, paragraph 51.
15. Since initiation of discussions in the Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021-2025 on a global points of contact directory, States have variously reflected on relevant regional and subregional experiences with a view to avoiding duplication and leveraging existing frameworks and resources. There has been wide agreement that States should draw on the experiences of regional and subregional organizations as well as other relevant United Nations mechanisms in the establishment of the directory. States have consistently expressed the view that duplication of existing frameworks and mechanisms should be avoided.

16. States have shared their experiences on existing directories of points of contact, inter alia, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum, Organization of American States and Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe. In this regard, States have discussed means of drawing on regional and subregional experiences, including by considering the nomination of the same points of contact to a future global directory as those identified at the regional and subregional levels. There have also been suggestions to consider means of allowing the cross-population of data such that submission of data at the regional or subregional level would be automatically replicated at the global level.

- **Association for Southeast Asian Nations Regional Forum**, Points of Contact since 2020, senior and working level contacts
- **Organization of American States**, Points of Contact since 2018, diplomatic/policy contacts
- **Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe**, Points of Contact since 2013, derived from “Confidence-building measure No.8”.

17. Throughout the three substantive sessions of the Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021-2025, as well as through the written inputs informing the present background information paper, States have reflected on several overarching working principles for the future global points of contact directory. In this regard, there is overall agreement among States that the directory should be a voluntary mechanism and decisions to participate must remain a national prerogative. Inputs of States have also indicated agreement that the directory should be established in accordance with the decisions and recommendations of the Open-ended working group.

18. Emphasizing the importance of the equal participation of all States, several principles have been proposed as needing to underpin the directory’s functioning, including mutual respect and benefit; non-interference in the affairs of States; State equality; political neutrality and territorial integrity.

19. States have also variously suggested that the following understandings guide the development and operationalization of the directory:

- The establishment of a voluntary global directory is important to advancing additional confidence-building measures and for implementing the agreed normative framework.
- Bearing in mind the different institutional settings of States and the need to maintain a degree of flexibility, overly detailed arrangements should be avoided.
- Given the sensitivity of relevant data, the custodian (i.e., United Nations Secretariat) should take necessary measures to secure the directory. Information exchanged should remain confidential and any further action beyond submission should be based on mutual consent.
- States may wish to designate the same points of contact that are included

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8 [https://www.osce.org/secretariat/cyber-ict-security](https://www.osce.org/secretariat/cyber-ict-security)
in relevant (sub-)regional directories.

- Capacity-building is essential to ensuring the directory is well-functioning such that a dedicated action plan for identified points of contact could be developed.
- Regular communication checks, and possibly scenario-based exercises, should be held to ensure the directory remains updated and operational.

20. Several States have expressed the view that the United Nations should play a key role in the context of efforts to create the directory. Many States have affirmed that the Office for Disarmament Affairs would be best suited to serve as custodian for the directory given its substantive focus and experience in managing mechanisms with similar characteristics.

IV. Objectives and functions

21. States have variously reflected on the objectives and functions of the points of contact directory concluding that such a mechanism should promote an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful information and communications technologies environment.

22. While a range of specific functions for the directory have been identified, the overarching purpose of the directory as a confidence-building measure that could help increase transparency and predictability, while also supporting a peaceful information and communications technologies environment and the peaceful resolution of disputes arising from the use of such technologies, is generally agreed among States.

23. Some States have emphasized that the objective of the directory should also be to establish pragmatic cooperation among responsible national entities for information and communications technologies incident response, such as Computer Emergency Response Teams.

24. Some States have underscored that the directory should serve as a means to develop international cooperation and assistance in this area, including for the detection, prevention and elimination of malicious activity utilizing information and communications technologies.

25. Some States have expressed the view that requisite capacity-building is required for the effective functioning of a future directory, particularly with regards to technical capacity. The principle of functional equivalence was highlighted in this context. In this regard, the view was expressed that to achieve functional equivalence for points of contact and to adapt them to the fast-moving information and communications technologies context, developing States need to acquire capacity through technology transfer and capacity-building measures to ensure that they have the necessary technical and technological capabilities to set up strong, well-functioning and adequately resourced points of contact. Some States have suggested that mechanisms for building capacity could include, inter alia, the provision of training and the conduct of exercises. These exercises and trainings could be offered by interested States in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs.

26. States have variously suggested specific objectives of the directory, including, inter alia:

- To support the easing of tensions, misunderstandings and misperceptions of information and communications technologies incidents
- To support exchange of data and sharing of good practice on existing and potential threats to security of and in the use of information and communications technologies
• To contribute to emergency response and information sharing, including in times of crisis
• To support protection of critical infrastructure and prevention of information and communications technologies incidents
• To facilitate the development of an early warning mechanism related to information and communications technologies incidents
• To serve as a platform for capacity-building, joint exercises and training
• To support organization of consultations between interested parties on issues of national concern

27. States have also suggested additional functions of the directory, including, inter alia:
• Conduct of periodic ‘ping’ exercises by the directory custodian to ensure contacts remain up-to-date and operational
• Development of standardized templates for exchanges, including facilitation of assistance requests
• Facilitation of real-time threat information sharing, including through alert notifications
• Organization of periodic, practical exercises and scenarios, including simulating cases of information and communications technologies incidents

V. Practical modalities of operation

28. Discussion on the practical modalities of operation for the directory have largely centred on the competencies of the designated focal points, the type of information to be submitted, the hosting platform, and the modalities for interaction among the contacts. In this context, States have continued to emphasize the importance of avoiding overly complicated modalities that may deter participation. States have also continued to underscore the need to avoid duplication of effort by taking into account existing directories at the regional and subregional levels.

29. Regarding the profile of the points of contact, many States have argued for a single point of contact able to channel requests within the national structures, while some others have supported the identification of separate points of contact in distinct disciplines. States have underscored that existing domestic structures must be taken into account.

30. States have variously suggested the identification of the following types of points of contact:
• Diplomatic/Policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs or comparable)
• Technical (Representative from national Computer Emergency Response Team, as applicable)
• Legal
• Assistance and capacity-building

31. There has been general agreement among States that the practical submission of information should include:
• Name and designation/position
• Organization, including webpage if applicable
• Email
• Phone
• Language(s) spoken

32. Some States have noted that input to the directory may be unique to reflect particular domestic circumstances. In this regard, some States noted the need to
accept, for example, the listing of multiple agencies under one function or a generic contact email/phone number in lieu of an individual name.

33. States have generally supported agreement on a regular interval for updating the directory information with many suggesting a one-year time period with the option to provide updates on a rolling basis, as required. Suggestions for updates biannually have also been made. The proposal has also been made to implement a mandatory 30-day notification timeframe for any changes to point of contact information. States have also suggested two possible mechanisms for States to update the directory: (a) States to send relevant updates to the custodian, or (b) States to directly update information in the directory (e.g., through a feature in the online portal).

34. Several States have called for the development of specific protocols and procedures for interaction and information exchange among the designated points of contact. Various States have emphasized the need to properly manage the interaction to ensure effective and efficient communication. In this context, the creation of a system to prioritize and/or qualify requests was made, which would indicate the level of urgency required for a response.

35. With due regard for the principle of multilingualism, several States have proposed that information submitted to the directory be accepted in all official United Nations languages. Other States have suggested that an unofficial English translation of directory information also be provided by the submitting State.

36. States have generally agreed that the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs would be best suited to serve as custodian. In this regard, many States have expressed preference for a dedicated online platform run by the Office for Disarmament that would host the directory.

37. Several States have expressed concern over issues that could arise related to confidentiality and accessibility. Therefore, many States have supported a password-protected directory webpage accessible only to States. In contrast, some States have supported an online, publicly accessible directory that would facilitate the engagement of regional and subregional organizations as well as non-governmental entities, including private entities and organizations. In this context, the view has been expressed that non-governmental entities, including some Computer Emergency Response Teams in the private sector, may have pertinent points of contact information to provide and thus should be allowed to engage in the directory. Other States have suggested a step-by-step approach in the directory’s establishment that would allow first for engagement among governmental points of contact followed by potential future consideration of integrating non-governmental entities.

38. A few States have noted potential funding implications associated with the operationalization of the points of contact directory, including for procurement and maintenance of the online platform. Some States have acknowledged that the Secretariat would require additional financial and human resources to ensure proper operationalization of the directory and suggested seeking requisite funding allocation through the regular General Assembly budgeting process by First Committee resolution.

39. Some States have suggested that the functionality and usefulness of the points of contact directory could be evaluated after one year or more of operation.

VI. Timeline for operationalization

40. Several States have called for an incremental operationalization of the points of contact directory. In this regard, several States have expressed the hope that agreement on the fundamental modalities of the directory be reached through the
Open-ended working group’s second annual progress report due to be concluded at its fifth substantive session in July 2023. This would include agreement on its primary objectives and functions as well as basic modalities for operation.

VII. Conclusion and observations by the Secretariat

41. There is broad support for the operationalization of an efficient, effective, intergovernmental directory of points of contact, which would support confidence-building in the area of information and communications technologies security. States recognize the value of such a platform to facilitating information exchange, reducing misperceptions and supporting dialogue in times of crisis.

42. Following several years of discussion on this proposal in multilateral fora, States appear poised to take concrete, practical steps towards realization of this initiative. Focused discussions on this proposal throughout the three substantive sessions of the current Open-ended working group have allowed ample time for States to consider the specific functions of the directory. Moreover, there is wide support for determining the concrete modalities for operationalization with a view to launching the directory in the near term with many indicating that the next annual progress report of the Open-ended working group in 2023 should take decisions to this end.

43. Efforts to ensure the peace and security of the information and communications technologies environment are becoming increasingly urgent. As the Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021-2025 continues its focused, concrete work to this end, early operationalization of a points of contact directory would not only build confidence between and among States, but also serve as a tool to pursue other cooperative measures to address threats arising from malicious use of such technologies. In this regard, the operationalization of a directory of points of contact would represent not an end in itself, but a critical next step towards a peaceful information and communications technologies environment.