FIRST's position on the aims of the OEWG

The Forum of Incident Response and Security Teams (FIRST), founded more than 30 years ago when the internet was still in its infancy, brings together over 600 incident response teams from nearly 100 states. FIRST’s members are national Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs), from the private sector and academia as well as Product Security Incident Response Teams (PSIRTs). FIRST champions capacity building and information exchange and produces much needed cybersecurity standards such as CVSS and TLP.

Diversity is in our DNA: FIRST members span the widest interests imaginable, yet are agreeing and working together towards a shared goal: Keeping the Internet a free and open place by protecting our users from malicious cyber operations conducted by states or criminal organisations.

FIRST welcomes the continuation of the OEWG, endorsing the previous work by the UN GGE and OEWG. It is our belief and experience that collaboration is always the better alternative to confrontation.

Let us first re-emphasize that, unlike the case with many other infrastructures, the technology that makes the internet function is far too complex to be managed, not to mention understood, by a single organisation. Every player in cyberspace depends on components outside his control. To make matters worse, today’s innovation rate adds new complexity to the system by the week. This interdependence creates what we have started to call supply chain risk.

It follows that misuse of one component in a malicious cyber operation is likely to have unintended side effects and may even backfire. On a positive note, this interdependence should be an incentive to collaborate, very much as incident responders do.

This is nothing new: The call to protect the public core of the internet has been made and maybe we really should treat it like a commons.

The stability and security of Cyberspace is important because an increasing number of people depend on it in their daily lives, not just as some form of entertainment but as a means to make a living. It is widely agreed that ICTs are instrumental in reaching the SDG.

However, it seems, that many players, states or tech companies still look at cyberspace as a place to achieve singular goals. We keep talking about the multi stakeholder dialog, but tend to forget the majority of the internet users are from civil society and increasingly from emerging economies. Studies show that commercially available threat intelligence, which most of us use to educate ourselves about risks, is extremely biased towards the big and wealthy players.
FIRST encourages states to take a holistic view when discussing responsible behaviour in cyberspace and to accept the fact that cyberspace is not a state run infrastructure, but a complex system that gains its value through all participating entities.

We would like to take this opportunity to point out that most internet users suffer more from cybercrime and human rights violations than from other forms of inadequate behaviour. FIRST welcome the creation of the UN’s ad hoc committee on countering cybercrime and encourage delegates to the OEWG to engage with members of the ad hoc committee.

FIRST members have been active countering any malicious activities for years. They have been collaborating across borders and across competitors, recognizing the common goals of keeping cyberspace safe for users. The key ingredient in this successful collaboration is trust. It is imperative that this trust is not carelessly endangered by abusing it. Similar to the accepted convention that, during a conflict, medical staff are off limits, but also must not be involved in combat activities, incident responders should not be attacked and not be attacking. FIRST welcomes the UN GGE’s 2015 recommendation to that effect. But we need to go further: FIRST encourages states to create policies which actively promote collaboration of security teams and do not punish their activities, be this research or information exchange.

To summarize: FIRST encourages this group to works towards ensuring that:

- Incident responders can continue to collaborate globally
- The good of all internet users is taken into account
- The core of the internet is to be considered a commons to the benefit of all

On behalf to FIRST

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