Statement H.E. Ambassador Mathu Joyini for the General Exchange of Views at the Open-ended Working Group on Security of and in the Use of Information and Communications Technologies 2021–2025

13 December 2021

Chairperson,

South Africa would like to express its appreciation to you, your team, and the Secretariat for the preparations leading up to the convening of this first substantive session on the Open-ended Working Group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies. You have our full support and commitment to continuing the achievement of consensus in moving this process forward.

While the work of this current OEWG is expected to span five years, it is vital that we acknowledge all the work done since the first introduction of this item by the Russian Federation in 1998. This includes building on the achievements of the previous Groups of Government Experts as well as the previous OEWG which reached consensus under the able and skillful leadership of Ambassador Jürg Lauber.

We would like to take this opportunity to also to thank Ms. Izumi Nakamitsu, Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs; and Ambassador Guilherme de Aguiar Patriota, Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts on advancing responsible State behaviour in cyberspace, for their work and statements here today.

Chairperson,

South Africa appreciates your approach in encouraging delegations to go beyond general statements and well-known positions and dive deeper into matters of concern. This
includes with concrete proposals and suggestion on the strands of our work. We support the approach to continue to consider:

- existing and potential threats;
- further development of norms, rules and principles of responsible State behaviour in cyberspace;
- how international law applies;
- confidence building measures;
- and capacity building.

Notwithstanding the envisioned approach, Chairperson, allow me to make the follow brief points on some of these areas, which will be elaborated on in our engagements throughout the week.

On **existing and potential threat**, we must bear in mind that the positive economic and social opportunities that can be derived from ICTs should not be overshadowed by the malicious use of these technologies. The cyber threats, if left unattended, have the potential of creating mistrust and lack of confidence in the use of ICTs, and could lead to an increase in cyber risks which could have a negative impact on the use of ICTs for development.

When discussing **norms, rules and principles for responsible State behaviour**, South Africa believes that it is unlikely that we will ever reach a point of having a complete and sustainable response to the opportunities and threats. Furthermore, we understand that the implementation of the existing norms and further development of the norms, rules and principles are not mutually exclusive efforts. Therefore, the further development of norms, rules and principles should be understood as a process of evaluating, updating - where necessary - and refining, rather than seeking to develop a completely new set of norms.

On the **applicability of international law**, South Africa welcomes the conclusion of the first OEWG that international law applies to the cyberspace and the recognition that more work is needed to reach common understandings on how international law is specifically applicable. We hope that, throughout this process, we can make the necessary gains in this area.
Chairperson,

South Africa believes that **Capacity building** is a key matter for many developing countries, and should include context specific training, transparency, sustainability, involve regional organizations, and be achieved through adequate funding. We must bring everyone on board in responding to this global challenge. We also believe that consideration of the best approaches to capacity building is linked to how the broader debates on the “regular institutional dialogue under UN auspices”, or on the need for a new legal instrument evolves.

Finally, South Africa would like to recognize that the First Committee and the General Assembly had adopted the resolution on “Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security,” by consensus. This was built on momentum from the consensus outcome of the previous OEWG. We, therefore, have a strong precedent to continue to pursue consensus and unity in this process.

This brings to mind the Luo Proverb, “Alone a youth runs fast, with an elder slow, but together they go far.” We, therefore, hope that in this new process we can consolidate our efforts building on the old processes to make significant and meaningful progress in the years ahead.

I thank you.