Distinguished Mr. Chair,

Distinguished colleagues,

The UN General Assembly resolution 75/240 that provided for the establishment of the Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) on security of and in the use of ICTs 2021-2025 fixes its mandate clearly and explicitly. The Group is empowered to deal with the whole range of issues related to ensuring international information security. This understanding was confirmed by consensus of all UN Member States in the General Assembly resolution № 76/19.

Nevertheless, at the first OEWG session we witnessed an attempt by a group of states to sideline substantive discussions by the settlement of an actually non-existent problem of NGO participation in the OEWG. I emphasize that, in effect, this problem does not exist; however this subject was and continues to be exploited with a view to delaying the discussion and distracting attention from fundamental issues of national security.

I doubt that any participant of today’s meeting is against the OEWG interacting with NGOs. As a representative of Russia, I need to highlight that it was upon our initiative in 2018 that other interested parties got access to UN negotiations on ICT-security for the first time in history.

I am also convinced that none of the colleagues present will contest the intergovernmental nature of the UN and the OEWG, in particular, as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. It is States that bear primary responsibility for ensuring security and possess the sovereign right to participate in negotiations, in decision-making process and in drafting official OEWG documents.

At the same time, NGOs have broad opportunities not only to follow the course of discussion, but also to make substantive contributions to it – either at informal
segments of substantive OEWG sessions, at intersessional meetings and through written submissions. What is more, nothing prevents States from voicing positions of national NGOs in their official statements. It is crucial to ensure that all of these contributions are directly related to the OEWG mandate, depoliticized and provide added value for the intergovernmental negotiations. This exact methodology proved itself successful and effective within the framework of the first OEWG 2018-2021.

In fact, we have no fundamental contradictions and nothing prevents us from continuing meaningful work at the second session of the Group. After all, it was for the sake of discussing substantive issues and elaborating concrete practical solutions that distinguished Ambassador Gafoor took the responsibility of conducting this negotiation process. Instead of imposing discussions on peripheral topics, let’s allow him to carry out his direct duties.

From our point of view, modalities of participation of non-governmental actors in the activities of the UN platforms should be discussed and regulated in detail at the level of the Organization, as long as the future of the whole UN system will largely depend on this issue. Given the significance and sensitivity of matters under consideration of the OEWG, as well as its method of decision-making – exclusively by consensus, we consider it counterproductive and even dangerous to use our mechanism as an “experimental field” for solving these issues.

I would also like to specifically touch upon two fundamental points. Within the OEWG States are empowered to discuss concrete issues of international information security. Appropriate funding was allocated for these purposes from the regular UN budget, formed from State contributions. Therefore, the participation of non-governmental actors in the discussion, which, as you may recall, is not stipulated in the OEWG mandate, should be strictly limited to the time reserved for them and should not prejudice the negotiation process among Member States. After all, it is States alone, rather than other interested parties, that bear responsibility for the outcomes of the whole process.

And a second issue. Any State has a sovereign right to reject the application of any non-governmental actor to participate in the OEWG and it is not obliged to do it publicly nor to explain the reasons for such a decision. The so called “transparency”
of the non-objection procedure in no way guarantees that any State will not reject the application of a particular NGO – I repeat – it is every States’ sovereign right. What this “transparency” does give, is a pretext to politicize the discussion and divert it from substantive issues of the OEWG mandate to mutual accusations in vetoing down this or that NGO. We assume that this scenario cannot correspond to the interests of States that are genuinely interested in ensuring peace and security in global information space.

We would be grateful to distinguished Mr. Chair for making the necessary amendments to the draft modalities that he circulated.

Thank you for your attention.