STATEMENT


New York, 28 March 2022
On agenda item 3 “Organization of work”:

Distinguished Ambassador Burhan Gafoor, Chair of the UN Open-ended Working Group,

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to greet all the participants of the second substantive session of the UN Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on security of and in the use of ICTs 2021-2025.

Amidst heightened geopolitical tensions, when one wrong step may provoke an uncontrolled escalation of a conflict, our work on maintaining peace and security in information space gains particular relevance. It is evident that ensuring international information security becomes one of the key factors that influence strategic stability. A cyber attack, be it accidental or intended, including perpetrated under false flag, can trigger fatal consequences.

In this context, given the growing importance of our work in the OEWG, I would like to join the Chair’s call for focusing the Group’s efforts on substantive negotiations and elaboration of concrete, practical decision and arrangements in this domain. I also call on everyone not to politicize the work of the OEWG. Instead, we should strictly follow its mandate enshrined in the UN General Assembly resolution 75/240 and further confirmed in resolution 76/19. There are other relevant platforms for general political debate.

I repeat: we presume that the OEWG should become a platform not just for debates, but for pragmatic and constructive negotiations aimed at achieving tangible, practical results.

As far as the programme of work suggested by the Chair is concerned, I would like to make the following remarks.

At informal consultations organized by the Chair on 18 March, a number of countries, including Russia, expressed concern over the lack of balance in the
document. Just one three-hour meeting is devoted to the discussion on rules, norms and principles, which are prioritized in the Group’s the mandate according to the UNGA resolution 75/240. At the same time, CBMs and capacity-building are going to be considered for almost a whole negotiation day.

We understand the logic behind the current programme of work. However, we assume that the OEWG’s mandate should be the basic guideline for our activities. We call for avoiding such incoherence in future.

A number of states, including Russia, also have reservations concerning the “virtual open-ended informal meeting, open to all delegations and interested parties”.

Due to significant differences in views of states, until now we have not been able to adopt the modalities for the interaction of the OEWG with businesses, NGOs and academia. To our regret, a group of states was unable to support the compromise Indian proposal. In these circumstances, the participation of non-governmental entities in the OEWG – as a subsidiary body of the UN General Assembly – should be limited to those organizations in consultative status with the ECOSOC or the GA itself. They can attend formal sessions as observers. The OEWG can interact with any other organizations only during the intersessional period, in an informal setting.

With that in mind, the status of the event schedule for 31 March remains unclear. We should take a decision on the modalities of interaction with NGOs before holding such a meeting. As for Russia, we remain fully supportive of the Indian proposal. We stand ready to consider it adopted. It represents a reasonable compromise that would allow us to actually start practical interaction with non-governmental actors and accrediting interested organizations at least by the time of the third substantive session. I venture to suggest that after we successfully overcome this stage, there may be no need to introduce any changes anymore.

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Otherwise, we are ready to continue discussing this issue in the intersessional period.

We need to avoid creating any new, unclear precedents that may even mislead us further consideration of the modalities for NGO participation. By way of
compromise, Russia is eager to join consensus on the programme of work suggested by the Chair, if it reflects – in writing – that holding an informal meeting with non-governmental entities on 31 March will not create any precedent for future work.

Against the background of our discussion on interaction with NGOs, Russia is concerned by an issue far more fundamental – the participation of official delegations in the work of the OEWG. Once again, we would like to bring to your attention a blatant violation of the obligations under the agreement on the United Nations headquarters by the state hosting the UN on its territory. The demand for ensuring participation of NGOs in the OEWG looks absurd when heads and members of delegations of a number of states cannot obtain an American visa to participate in the official sessions of the Group. In our case, this has to do with the head of the Russian delegation – Special representative of the President of the Russian Federation for international cooperation in the field of information security, Ambassador Andrey Krutskikh – who is the architect of the OEWG format with no exaggeration. The problem is systemic. We request the Chair and the UN Secretariat to elaborate suggestions on possible ways to manage this situation.

I wish successful and fruitful work to representatives of all states. Thank you for your attention.