UN Table-Top Exercise Programme for National Cyber Points of Contact

Concept Note

[Note: This concept paper elaborates on a proposal made by the Singapore national delegation at the First and Second Substantive Sessions of the OEWG on Security of and in the use of Information and Communications Technologies (OEWG 2021 – 2025).]

Purpose

1. The purpose of this project is to develop a UN Table-Top Exercise (TTX) Programme for national cyber points of contact (in partnership with UN Institute for Disarmament Research) that will:

   • Provide an opportunity for all UN Member States to participate in a substantive cyber exercise regardless of current technical capacity and/or regional organisation affiliation status;

   • Improve the capabilities of national cyber points of contact (POCs) to respond to real-world incidents and cyber crises; and

   • Demonstrate the effectiveness and value of the proposed global points of contact directory.

Background

2. The Open-Ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (2019 - 2021) recommended that States consider nominating national cyber POCs, **inter alia**, at the technical, policy and diplomatic levels, as doing so would help facilitate coordination and communication between Member States, especially in times of crisis.

3. States were also encouraged to consider how a directory of national POCs could be established at the global level. In the event of cyber crises or incidents, a directory would help facilitate rapid communication, facilitate the de-escalation of tensions, and prevent misunderstandings and misperceptions in the event of cyber incidents. Such a directory could also facilitate increased information sharing and response coordination in the face of new and emerging threats.

4. These initiatives are most beneficial when: (a) national POCs have the necessary skills and experience to respond effectively to real-world incidents; and (b) the information in the directory of national POCs is accurate, well-maintained, and up to date.

5. To this end, it is useful to conduct regular inter-POC exercises as a form of training and testing to strengthen the capabilities of POCs. Such exercises are often organised at the regional level between well-established CERTs, including the APCERT Drill (since 2005), ASEAN CERT Incident Drill (since 2006) and International CyberEx (since 2015).

6. However, the current roster of exercises conducted by the international community is insufficient to fulfil these goals. **First**, there is a need for exercises that are accessible to all interested UN Member States. Current (sub-) regional inter-CERT exercises are not accessible to a significant number of Member States, including: (a) those that are not members of regional...
organisations or whose regional organisations do not conduct such exercises; and (b) those who do not have CERTs or whose CERTs have only been recently established and are not part of established (sub-) regional CERT networks. **Second**, there is also a need for exercises that cater to POCs beyond the operational/technical domains. While inter-CERT exercises are common, there are fewer exercises available for POCs in other domains (e.g. diplomatic, policy).

**Description**

7. We envisage that the TTX Programme will consist of a series of standalone exercises conducted over the course of a three-year cycle. Exercises will be based on real-world scenarios to hone and refine the skills needed by POCs to respond to real-world incidents. Each exercise in the series will be progressively more challenging to build up Member States’ capacities in responding to cyber incidents.

8. We also envisage that the TTX Programme can be paired with a briefing session conducted ahead of each TTX to prepare Member States for the exercise. Given that POCs are likely to have varying levels of skills and experience, the aim of the session would be to build a common base of knowledge and understanding amongst POCs and ensure that all POCs have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities ahead of the TTX.

**Scope**

9. The first iteration of the TTX Programme will be open to all UN Member States that have nominated or are willing to nominate POCs in the operational/technical domain (e.g. POCs from national cybersecurity agencies or from national CERTs) through the National Survey of Implementation of UN recommendations on responsible use of ICTs by States in the context of international security.

10. Future iterations of the TTX Programme could be extended beyond POCs in the operational/technical domain and could potentially include POCs in the diplomatic and policy domains.

**Feedback and Comments**

11. We welcome feedback and comments on the substance of this proposal, as well as expressions of interest by OEWG delegations who may wish to partner with Singapore in the further development of this proposal and in taking this project forward.

12. Comments and expressions of interest may be provided to: [ttx_programme@csa.gov.sg](mailto:ttx_programme@csa.gov.sg).