Throughout history, weapons and tactics of warfare have continuously evolved. Children have faced severe risks throughout that same history of conflict, exposed to death, injury and other serious violations of their rights. In the current era, a convergence of emerging technology utilized in complex weapons systems poses potential new risks to children, demanding immediate action to put in place safeguards to protect children.

Cyberconflict, appearing alongside conventional conflict, is one of these new realities. Cyberattacks, such as those intended to shut down critical infrastructure or to damage national databases, can cause immediate harm to children or impact them in the longer term. Disinformation campaigns launched through the same technology can be used to undermine social cohesion in a targeted country or community and negatively impact child wellbeing.

The inability to trace and attribute attacks with certainty both raises and limits the stakes, as it may embolden some to use these weapons with less inhibition. A range of actors, including Non-State armed groups and criminal organizations, some purportedly acting as proxies for state actors, also have increasing access to and the ability to use these weapons. Robust frameworks to protect children and the broader civilian population in conventional armed conflicts exist, but the application of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, international humanitarian law, and other mechanisms in these evolving circumstances, especially when an attack is conducted outside of broader conflict, requires further clarification. Likewise, the practical mechanisms to safeguard children specifically must be considered carefully.

It is in this light that the Permanent Mission of Finland and UNICEF will convene an event to launch UNICEF’s new analytical report and organize a discussion on the Protection of Children during Cyberconflict. This event aims to bring together participants drawn from Member States, the UN, civil society, and the private sector. We hope that through the discussion we will come closer to understanding the necessary steps to reinforce safeguards for children in cyberconflict.

The questions this event will explore include:

- What are the ways in which cyberconflict is and could be manifested? What unique challenges does cyberconflict present?
- What types of risks can cyberconflict pose to children?
- What steps are being taken to protect civilians and civilian objects from harm during cyberconflict? What special provisions for children are included in these? What are the gaps?
- How can safeguards to protect children during cyberconflict be strengthened?

The author of the analytical report, Ms. Eleonore Pauwels, will introduce the report’s observations and recommendations, followed by a panel discussion with representatives from civil society and the private sector. The panel will be followed by a Q&A.