Civil Society Statements to OEWG, Weds 27 July 2022
“6th meeting of the OEWG”

As the Founding Partner and Board member of Women in CyberSecurity MiddleEast Group and presenting under the Umbrella of Write Pilot, I would like to Thank you Chair for this valuable opportunity to hear our voice and hopefully find our Success stories and initiatives insightful to learn from as we have been experiencing an outstanding learning in the past couple days. And I thank you for such a valuable learning opportunity that will help us indeed in enhancing our services offered to the communities and bring them to the next level.

Now in addressing the guided question #1, I would like to state the following:

The ‘Women in Cyber Security Middle East’ Group also shortened for “WiCSME”, was formed in 2018 to promote and increase Women participation in the field of Cyber Security. It is a Voluntary Group and has a Vision to build a strong, dependable, and increasing network of passionate Female CyberSecurity Professionals in the Middle East and North African countries, and eventually increase the percentage of Women Workforce in the field of Cyber security and encourage for more Female Leadership in Cyber Security in the region.

Within these 5 years, our WiCSME has built a strong foundation fully aligned with our regional culture, religious and societal values and grown from 9 to over 1800 members across 23 countries. We have experienced historical moments where we introduced many initiatives to successfully create a platform for our sisters in the region, that is fuelled by respect, openness to ideas, constructive feedback, and strive towards excellence.

And in this manner, I would like to bring special attention to the key Capacity Building initiatives and achievements by WiCSME, all of which were firsts in our Middle east region:

1. We are Proud to say that we now have a platform where our women in cybersecurity, ‘young rising stars and experienced’, have equal chance to share their knowledge, have their voices heard and their individual strengths appreciated.
2. We have created opportunities for them to participate alongside their male peers and build their technical, soft and collaborative skills as part of the WiCSME annual regional Capture the Flag competition. In 2020, 36% of the 600 participants were females, and in 2021, we had 63% female participants. This is a double-digit year-on-year growth, which speaks for the impact we are making, while recognising and managing the challenges that are often faced in a regional setup.
3. For the first time, we introduced a formal way of recognising, appreciating and showcasing the unique capabilities and contributions of our Women in cybersecurity as the annual WiCSME Awards – be it in the capacity of a leader, a rising star, or a contribution towards community. We do not only celebrate our women, but also our Male Allies whose support is fundamental in steering this movement forward.

We have felt a tremendous increase in confidence level of our members, who are now taking on bigger and better challenges in their personal and professional lives. They are now transforming from being a follower to a leader, from setting in the passenger seat to taking
the wheel in the driver seat, who don’t only think about themselves, but also contribute back as Givers to the community in their own unique and talented ways and capacities. They now have a network and safety net of like-minded women, where they feel confident to lean on when in problem or dilemma.

Looking at this congregation here, I feel that we are very similar to the UN in some capacity and its ethos, in that we are bringing together our WiCSME affiliate countries towards a common goal. Needless to say, we could not achieve all this without support from our Partners Of Success. I would like to pay special thanks to Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Sciences “KFAS” and the UK-Gulf Women in Cyber Fellowship who have been with us in this journey since the beginning.

While we have achieved so much in a voluntary capacity and contributions from our passionate and brilliant members, we recognise that we now need to build a more formalised and structured framework focussed on creating a more sustainable organisation which will carry forward the torch of this movement, build the foundation and breathe the life to the organization to flourish and create many more historical moments for generations to come.

This will require more collaborative efforts and support from various corners of the society – including and not limited to- private and public organisations, governments, academia, and community programmes.

It is a moment of pride to be able to State on this global forum and stage that WiCSME has successfully created an Avenue for the Women in CyberSecurity in the MiddleEast nurtured by our Values and Culture to showcase, foster and celebrate their talents In and Beyond the world of CyberSecurity. We are creating “Leaders” who believe in being ‘Stronger together’, and “Givers” who actively contribute to our Societies and to the ‘Global Sisterhood of CyberSecurity’.

To conclude, we hope there will be a day where we have a ‘United Nations of Women in Cybersecurity’ that unites these tremendous efforts of various Women in CyberSecurity Groups’ from all over the globe, to collectively support us in achieving The Mission and making The Difference of which Women in CyberSecurity needs and generations yet to come will need in this World.

This might sound like a big dream and “perhaps, Mr. Chair, a bit complicated ingredients of the Smoothie metaphor you had kindly referenced to”. And to achieve Big dreams with great Goals, We need to be committed to be able to 'Start', and consisted to be able to 'Finish'.

Today we are Here and that’s a 'Start'. And Together, by putting collectively Our 3H’s in Action (Our Hearts, Our Heads, and Our Hands), We will hopefully be able to achieve our Goals and 'Finish'. As we are and will always be “StrongerTogether”.

Thank you Mr. Chair.