

OPENING REMARKS BY THE CHAIR OF THE OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON SECURITY OF AND IN THE USE OF ICTS 2021-2025, AMBASSADOR BURHAN GAFOOR, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AT THE THIRD SUBSTANTIVE SESSION OF THE OEWG, 25 JULY 2022

Distinguished delegates, at this stage, I would like to offer some remarks in my capacity as Chair of this working group. I would like to once again welcome all of you to the third substantive session of the open-ended working group. I would like to make a few general points.

2 First, this session in my view is particularly significant because it marks the closing of the first annual cycle of the OEWG process. You will recall that we held our organizational session in June 2021, the first substantive session in December 2021, and the second substantive session in March 2022. After more than twelve months of deliberations, I think we have a collective responsibility to show progress and deliver some results. This session is therefore a test of our ability to work together and to build consensus. The reality is that we have not had an easy start to this process. We spent ten long months working on an agreement on modalities for the participation of stakeholders. We finally reached an agreement on modalities for stakeholder participation in April this year. The modalities we agreed have allowed for the accreditation of stakeholders, some of whom are here today. I welcome them to the meeting. The agreement we reached on modalities may not be perfect, but it has allowed for increased participation of stakeholders in our process. It is my hope that with the modalities we have adopted, more and more stakeholders will be able to participate in the work of the Working Group. I take this opportunity to thank all the stakeholders who are participating in this session, and also all the stakeholders who may be following our important work virtually through UN Web TV. I want to tell the stakeholders that I attach the greatest importance to your contribution to the OEWG process, and as Chair I will continue to engage with stakeholders through informal meetings as well as at dedicated stakeholder sessions as agreed in our modalities. The agreement we reached on modalities for stakeholder participation was possible because of the flexibility shown by all delegations. I want to put on record my appreciation to all delegations for their support and spirit of flexibility. I hope that this spirit of flexibility and constructiveness will continue as we begin our important work at this session.

3 The second point that I wish to make is that the open-ended working group must deliver results if it is to be credible. As we begin our third substantive session, it is important that we work together to make the Open-Ended Working Group an action-oriented and results-focused process. I have said many times before that the working group cannot just be a talk shop. Many countries, especially smaller countries, and developing countries, are looking to the OEWG for results. In the last twelve months, we have all seen that many smaller delegations and developing countries are closely engaged in the Working Group process. The level of interest in the work of the OEWG is very high. Many developing countries and small delegations have very high expectations of this working group. In my view, this is a very encouraging sign because it indicates that members of the UN attach great importance to the issue of ICT security. It is also clear from our discussions in this Working Group over the last twelve months that UN members attach great importance to the implementation of the framework of rules, norms and principles. This too is a very encouraging sign. That is why it is important for this working group to deliver concrete results. If we are not able to show progress, the reality is that many delegations will lose interest in the Open-Ended Working Group process. This in turn will affect our credibility, and also affect the credibility of the United Nations. It is therefore important that we continue to make progress on the essential work of implementation of norms and of delivering action and results. At the same time, it is equally important for our working group to continue developing and deepening common understandings on the issue of ICT security in accordance with our mandate. The development of common understandings has been a key part of the UN's work in the area of ICT security. It is through this work that we have been able to consolidate an initial framework for responsible state behaviour in the use of ICTs, which is what we now refer to collectively as the *acquis*. In our last two substantive sessions, we have had many useful discussions on each of the six pillars of the mandate. However, these discussions were a little too general and I think it is necessary for us to move to more focused discussions on specific issues at our future substantive sessions of the OEWG. That is why we need the Annual Progress Report to provide a clear roadmap for our future work and identify specific issues of focused discussions.

4 The third point that I want to make that it is very important for the credibility and effectiveness of this working group that we adopt the Annual Progress Report at the end of the week. The Annual Progress Report is a means to capture the many concrete proposals that delegations have made at the first and second substantive sessions. The Annual Progress Report will provide a clear roadmap for our work in the future. For these reasons, it is my view that the

adoption of an Annual Progress Report at the end of the week is not an option but a necessity. Let me put it differently, the adoption of an Annual Progress Report is not a nice to have. It is, in my view, an essential requirement for the OEWG to continue its work next year in a focused and substantive manner. If we are unable to adopt an APR at this session, then it is likely that we will be faced with a scenario next year where we will repeat the same general discussions. In my view, it is not an efficient use of time to repeat a general discussion on the same issues next year. If we are unable to agree on an APR, the reality is that there will be no clear guidance for the Secretariat and for the Chair to begin work during the inter-sessional period. In the absence of an APR, the inter-sessional period will therefore be a wasted opportunity. That is why, distinguished delegates, I am convinced that we need a detailed and focused APR that provides a clear roadmap for our work next year.

5 Finally, I want to emphasise to delegations the urgency of reaching an agreement on the Annual Progress Report by the end of this week. We do not have the option of extending our work, or conducting inter-sessional consultations beyond this week. To put it starkly, we do not have the option of kicking the can down the road. The reality is that August will be a very busy month at the UN in New York for many First Committee delegates because of other important UN meetings that will take place. September is the beginning of high-level week, and also the beginning of the 77th session of the General Assembly. In October and November, the UN will be busy with the work of the main committees, including the First Committee. In other words, if we do not reach an agreement on an APR this week, we will have no opportunity for another discussion at a later stage. Looking at the calendar, it is clear to me that if we do not adopt an Annual Progress Report by this week, there will simply be no other chance to do so. I would therefore like to urge all of you to work together and do your best to reach agreement within this week. I also encourage all delegations to reach out and talk to each other in order to build bridges, to build trust, and to build consensus. I am deeply aware that the world is facing many challenges and geopolitical tensions. And yet it is important in my view that we talk about our differences in a spirit of mutual trust and mutual respect. Indeed, that is what the United Nations is about. It is a place to talk to each other in a spirit of mutual trust and mutual respect. As I have said many times before, the OEWG is itself a confidence-building measure. It is in this working group that we have to build trust and build confidence. Or if necessary, rebuild trust and rebuild confidence. I therefore encourage all delegations to use this week productively, to reach out and talk to other delegations. I would also like to urge all delegations to work together in a flexible and constructive spirit towards the common objective of

enhancing international peace and security in the sphere of ICTs. Our efforts this week will also be important in setting the tone for the rest of our five-year process. If we are able to agree on a draft Annual Progress Report, this would give our process much needed momentum and energy to make further progress next year and in the years to come, and hopefully pave the way for a comprehensive and meaningful final report at the end of our process in 2025. Distinguished delegates, I look forward to working with all of you over the coming days. This concludes my opening remarks as Chair of the Open-Ended Working Group.

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