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## Open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025

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### Background information paper on the global points of contact directory

Paper by the Secretariat

#### Contents

	<i>Page</i>
I. Introduction . . . . .	2
II. Decision to establish, and previous discussions of, the global points of contact directory . . . .	3
III. Guiding principles and overarching understandings . . . . .	3
IV. Objectives and functions . . . . .	5
V. Practical modalities of operation . . . . .	6
VI. Timeline for operationalization . . . . .	8
VII. Conclusion and observations by the Secretariat . . . . .	8



## I. Introduction

1. By its resolution [75/240](#), the General Assembly decided to convene, starting from 2021, under the auspices of the United Nations, a new open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, acting on a consensus basis.

2. The working group held its organizational session on 1 June 2021, its first substantive session from 13 to 17 December 2021, its second substantive session from 28 March to 1 April 2022 and its third substantive session from 25 to 29 July 2022, at United Nations Headquarters. To maintain momentum and build on the progress made, the Chair of the working group, Burhan Gafoor (Singapore), convened a series of informal, intersessional meetings from 5 to 9 December 2022, also at Headquarters.

3. At its third substantive session, on 29 July 2022, the working group adopted its draft report, as contained in [A/AC.292/2022/L.1](#), and decided to include in its report the outcome of its substantive discussions (see [A/77/275](#), annex).

4. The first annual report of the working group, including the progress report of its substantive discussions, was issued on 8 August 2022 as document [A/77/275](#). A compendium of statements in explanation of position on the report was issued as document [A/AC.292/2022/INF/4](#).

5. Paragraph 3 of the recommended next steps in section E (confidence-building measures) of the annex to the annual report, entitled “Progress report on the discussions of the working group on agenda item 5”, reads as follows:

The UN Secretariat is requested to seek views from States on the global points of contact directory, which could include views on experiences at the regional and subregional levels, and produce a background information paper on these views by the end of January 2023 for consideration at the fourth session of the OEWG.

6. Pursuant to this request of the working group, on 30 August 2022, the Office for Disarmament Affairs of the Secretariat disseminated a note verbale in which it sought the views of States on the global points of contact directory, with a deadline of 25 November 2022 for the submission of views. A deadline extension until 30 December 2022 was subsequently granted.

7. As at 30 December 2022, the following States had submitted views on the global points of contact directory: Armenia, Austria, China, Colombia, Czechia, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Italy, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, South Africa, Spain and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

8. The texts of all views received from States are available in full in the original language of submission on the webpage of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025.<sup>1</sup>

9. The present background information paper, which is based on the views received from States, is submitted pursuant to the request contained in the annex to document [A/77/275](#).<sup>2</sup> It should be read in conjunction with the inputs received from States, as it

<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/57871>.

<sup>2</sup> Pursuant to the request of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, the Secretariat is providing the present background information paper for the further consideration of States and without prejudice to their individual views or to future discussions in and decisions of the working group.

provides a summary of the key points and views expressed rather than a verbatim compilation of views.

## II. Decision to establish, and previous discussions of, the global points of contact directory

10. In the first annual progress report of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025 ([A/77/275](#), annex), States agreed to establish, building on work already done at the regional level, a global, intergovernmental points of contact directory. States also agreed to engage in further focused discussions, at the fourth and fifth sessions of the working group, on the development of such a directory, on a consensus basis, and to discuss initiatives related to capacity-building, taking into account available best practices such as regional and subregional experiences, where appropriate.<sup>3</sup>

11. Prior to the above-mentioned decisions of the working group, discussions among States on the establishment of a points of contact directory in the area of information and communications technologies security had been ongoing within the framework of the first open-ended working group on the subject, the Open-ended Working Group on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security, established pursuant to General Assembly resolution [73/27](#) and decision 75/550.

12. The predecessor Working Group discussed the viability of establishing a central global directory of points of contact, noting that the security of such a directory as well as its operational modalities would be crucial to its effectiveness, as would avoiding duplicative or overly detailed arrangements. The value of conducting exercises among a network of points of contact was also emphasized with a view to maintaining readiness and responsiveness.<sup>4</sup>

13. The Working Group concluded that establishing national points of contact was a confidence-building measure in itself, but it was also a helpful measure for the implementation of many other confidence-building measures and was invaluable in times of crisis. The Working Group recognized that States might find it useful to have points of contact for, inter alia, diplomatic, policy, legal and technical exchanges, as well as for incident reporting and response.<sup>5</sup> It encouraged States to consider the modalities of establishing a directory of points of contact at the global level.<sup>6</sup>

## III. Guiding principles and overarching understandings

14. States have expressed broad agreement that the establishment and subsequent operationalization of a global, intergovernmental points of contact directory would serve as a confidence-building measure and has the potential to support information exchange, including in times of crisis, and capacity-building. States have reaffirmed their support for the decision of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, documented in its first annual progress report, to establish such a directory.

15. Since the initiation of discussions in the working group on a global points of contact directory, various States have reflected on relevant regional and subregional

<sup>3</sup> See “Recommended next steps” in [A/77/275](#), annex, section E, para. 2.

<sup>4</sup> See [A/75/816](#), annex II, para. 30.

<sup>5</sup> [A/75/816](#), annex I, para. 47.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 51.

experiences with a view to avoiding duplication and leveraging existing frameworks and resources. There has been extensive agreement that States should draw on the experiences of regional and subregional organizations as well as other relevant United Nations mechanisms in the establishment of the directory. States have consistently expressed the view that the duplication of existing frameworks and mechanisms should be avoided.

16. States have shared their experiences with existing directories of points of contact, including directories of the Regional Forum of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations,<sup>7</sup> the Organization of American States<sup>8</sup> and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, States have discussed means of drawing on regional and subregional experiences, including by considering the nomination, to a future global directory, of the same points of contact as those identified at the regional and subregional levels. There have also been suggestions that means of allowing the cross-population of data could be considered such that the submission of data at the regional or subregional level would be automatically replicated at the global level.

17. Throughout the three substantive sessions of the working group, as well as through the written inputs informing the present background information paper, States have reflected on several overarching working principles for the future global points of contact directory. In this regard, there is overall agreement among States that the directory should be a voluntary mechanism and that decisions to participate must remain a national prerogative. Inputs of States have also indicated agreement that the directory should be established in accordance with the decisions and recommendations of the working group.

18. Emphasizing the importance of the equal participation of all States, several principles have been proposed as necessary for underpinning the functioning of the directory, including mutual respect and benefit, non-interference in the affairs of States, State equality, political neutrality and territorial integrity.

19. Various States have also suggested that the following understandings guide the development and operationalization of the directory:

- The establishment of a voluntary global directory is important for advancing additional confidence-building measures and implementing the agreed normative framework
- Bearing in mind the different institutional settings of States and the need to maintain a degree of flexibility, overly detailed arrangements should be avoided
- Given the sensitivity of relevant data, the custodian (i.e. the Secretariat) should take the measures necessary to secure the directory. Information exchanged should remain confidential, and any further action beyond submission should be based on mutual consent
- States may wish to designate the same points of contact that are included in relevant regional or subregional directories
- Capacity-building is essential to ensure that the directory functions well. To this end, one State has suggested the development of a dedicated action plan for identified points of contact

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<sup>7</sup> Directory of points of contact at the senior and working levels since 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Directory of diplomatic and policy points of contact since 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Directory of points of contact since 2013, derived from confidence-building measure No. 8 contained in document PC.DEC/1202 of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

- Regular communication checks, and possibly scenario-based exercises, should be carried out to ensure that the directory remains updated and operational

20. Several States have expressed the view that the United Nations should play a key role in efforts to create the directory. Many States have affirmed that the Office for Disarmament Affairs would be best suited to serve as the custodian of the directory, given the Office's substantive focus and experience in managing mechanisms with similar characteristics.

#### IV. Objectives and functions

21. Various States have reflected on the objectives and functions of the points of contact directory, concluding that such a mechanism should promote an open, secure, stable, accessible and peaceful information and communications technologies environment.

22. While a range of specific functions for the directory have been identified, the overarching purpose of the directory as a confidence-building measure that could help to increase transparency and predictability while supporting a peaceful information and communications technologies environment and the peaceful resolution of disputes arising from the use of such technologies, is generally agreed among States.

23. Some States have emphasized that an additional objective of the directory should be to establish pragmatic cooperation among national entities responsible for responding to information and communications technologies incidents, such as computer emergency response teams.

24. A number of States have underscored that the directory should serve as a means of developing international cooperation and assistance in this area, including for the detection, prevention and elimination of malicious activity utilizing information and communications technologies.

25. Some States have expressed the view that capacity-building is required for the effective functioning of a future directory, in particular with regard to technical capacity. The principle of functional equivalence was highlighted in this context. In this regard, the view was expressed that, to achieve functional equivalence for points of contact and adapt them to the fast-moving information and communications technologies context, developing States needed to acquire capacity through technology transfer and capacity-building measures to ensure that they had the necessary technical and technological capabilities to set up strong, well-functioning and adequately resourced points of contact. Some States have suggested that mechanisms for building capacity could include the provision of training and the conduct of exercises. The exercises and training could be offered by interested States in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, the Office for Disarmament Affairs.

26. Various States have suggested specific objectives of the directory, including:

- To support the easing of tensions, misunderstandings and misperceptions regarding information and communications technologies incidents
- To support the exchange of data and the sharing of good practices on existing and potential threats to the security of and in the use of information and communications technologies
- To contribute to emergency response and information-sharing, including in times of crisis
- To support the protection of critical infrastructure and prevention of information and communications technologies incidents

- To facilitate the development of an early warning mechanism related to information and communications technologies incidents
  - To serve as a platform for capacity-building, joint exercises and training
  - To support the organization of consultations between interested parties on issues of national concern
27. States have also suggested additional functions for the directory, including:
- The conduct of periodic “ping” exercises by the directory custodian to ensure that contacts remain up to date and operational
  - The development of standardized templates for exchanges, including for facilitating assistance requests
  - The facilitation of the real-time sharing of information on threats, including through alert notifications
  - The organization of periodic, practical exercises and scenarios, including simulating cases of information and communications technologies incidents

## **V. Practical modalities of operation**

28. Discussions of the practical modalities of operation for the directory have largely centred on the competencies of the designated focal points, the type of information to be submitted, the hosting platform, and the modalities for interaction among the contacts. In this context, States have continued to emphasize the importance of avoiding overly complicated modalities that may deter participation. States have also continued to underscore the need to avoid duplication of effort by taking into account existing directories at the regional and subregional levels.

29. Regarding the profile of the points of contact, many States have argued for a single point of contact capable of channelling requests within the national structures, while others have supported the identification of separate points of contact in distinct disciplines. States have underscored that existing domestic structures must be taken into account.

30. Various States have suggested the identification of the following types of points of contact:

- Diplomatic/policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs or comparable)
- Technical (representative of a national computer emergency response team, where applicable)
- Legal
- Assistance and capacity-building

31. There is general agreement among States that the practical submission of information should include the following:

- Name and designation or position
- Entity, including web page, if applicable
- Email address
- Telephone number
- Language(s) spoken

32. Some States have noted that some variations in the input for the directory may be required in order to reflect particular domestic circumstances. In this regard, some States noted the need to accept, for example, the listing of multiple agencies under one function or a generic contact email or phone number, in lieu of the contact details specific to a named individual.

33. States have generally supported the agreement of a regular interval for updating the directory information, with many suggesting a yearly update, with the option to provide updates on a rolling basis, as required. Suggestions of biannual updates have also been made. In addition, it has been proposed to implement a mandatory 30-day notification time frame for any changes to point of contact information. States have also suggested two possible mechanisms through which States could update the directory: (a) sending relevant updates to the custodian; or (b) updating information in the directory directly (e.g., through a feature in the online portal).

34. Several States have called for the development of specific protocols and procedures for interaction and information exchange among the designated points of contact. Various States have emphasized the need to properly manage the interaction so as to ensure effective and efficient communication. In this context, it was suggested that a system could be created to prioritize or qualify requests to indicate the level of urgency for the required response.

35. With due regard for the principle of multilingualism, several States have proposed that information submitted to the directory be accepted in the six official languages of the United Nations. Other States have suggested that an unofficial English translation of directory information also be provided by the submitting State.

36. States have generally agreed that the Office for Disarmament Affairs would be best suited to serve as custodian. In this regard, many States have expressed the preference for a dedicated online platform run by the Office for Disarmament, which would host the directory.

37. Several States have expressed concern over issues that could arise in relation to confidentiality and accessibility. Therefore, many States have supported a password-protected directory web page accessible only by States. In contrast, some States have supported an online, publicly accessible directory that would facilitate the engagement of regional and subregional organizations as well as non-governmental entities, including private entities and organizations. In this context, the view has been expressed that non-governmental entities, including some computer emergency response teams in the private sector, may have pertinent point-of-contact information to provide and thus should be allowed to engage with the directory. Other States have suggested a step-by-step approach to establishing the directory that would allow for engagement among governmental points of contact and subsequently the potential future consideration of integrating non-governmental entities.

38. A number of States have noted potential funding implications associated with the operationalization of the points of contact directory, including for procurement and maintenance related to the online platform. Some States have acknowledged that the Secretariat would require additional financial and human resources to ensure the proper operationalization of the directory and suggested seeking the allocation of the requisite funding through the regular budget by means of a resolution of the First Committee to be adopted by the General Assembly.

39. Some States have suggested that the functionality and usefulness of the points of contact directory could be evaluated after one year of operation or longer.

## **VI. Timeline for operationalization**

40. Several States have called for the incremental operationalization of the points of contact directory. In this regard, several States have expressed the hope that agreement on the fundamental modalities of the directory could be reflected in the second annual progress report of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025, which is due to be finalized at its fifth substantive session, in July 2023. This would include agreement on its primary objectives and functions as well as on the basic modalities for operation.

## **VII. Conclusion and observations by the Secretariat**

41. There is broad support for the operationalization of an efficient, effective, intergovernmental directory of points of contact, which would support confidence-building in the area of information and communications technologies security. States recognize the value of such a platform for facilitating information exchange, reducing misperceptions and supporting dialogue in times of crisis.

42. Following several years of discussion of this proposal in multilateral forums, States appear poised to take concrete, practical steps towards its realization. Focused discussions of the proposal throughout the three substantive sessions of the open-ended working group on security of and in the use of information and communications technologies 2021–2025 have allowed ample time for States to consider the specific functions of the directory. Moreover, there is extensive support for determining the concrete modalities for operationalization with a view to launching the directory in the near term, with many States indicating that the working group should take decisions to that end and report on them in the next annual progress report, in 2023.

43. Efforts to ensure the peace and security of the information and communications technologies environment are becoming increasingly urgent. As the working group continues its focused, concrete work to this end, the early operationalization of a points of contact directory would not only build confidence between and among States but also serve as a tool to pursue other cooperative measures to address threats arising from the malicious use of such technologies. In this regard, the operationalization of a directory of points of contact would represent not an end in itself but a critical next step towards a peaceful information and communications technologies environment.

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