



Statement by H.E. Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Head of Delegation of the Holy See, under agenda item 3 (“General debate”)

Madam Chair,

The Holy See congratulates you, Madam Chair, and all members of the Bureau on your election and assures you of the constructive engagement of its delegation during this and future sessions.

As the work of this Committee begins in earnest, the Holy See takes this opportunity to express its firm support for the elaboration of a comprehensive international convention on countering the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for criminal purposes.

Joining many others, my delegation is deeply concerned that criminal use of ICTs threatens international peace and security, violates fundamental human rights and hinders the attainment of integral human development. Unfortunately, the use of ICTs to organize and commit criminal activities across national borders surpasses the capacity and resources of any single national law enforcement agency, thus rendering effective international cooperation indispensable.

On the other hand, when considering this topic, we must bear in mind that the rapid development of ICTs has been, on the whole, extremely positive. Digital technologies allow for a wider sharing of knowledge, promote economic development and offer new possibilities for education, health care and personal growth. These technologies have opened up new horizons, particularly for those living in situations of poverty and distant from the urban centres of more industrialized countries.¹ Our efforts to prevent and counter the criminal use of ICTs should not dampen their legitimate use.

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the participants in the Congress on “Child Dignity in the Digital World”*, 14 November 2019.

Within the manifold reality of cybercrimes, the Holy See wishes to draw attention to three specific contexts that deserve attention in this Committee's work:

The first is the use of ICTs for terrorist purposes as it relates to international peace and security. By taking advantage of the dark web's borderless and anonymous nature, malicious actors have propelled activity such as illicit arms sales. Indeed, recent studies of the dark web revealed that firearms are the most commonly listed item for purchase, followed by arms-related digital products including ammunition. This enables terrorists — both those belonging to terrorist networks as well as those acting alone — to purchase arms anonymously and without restrictions.

The second is financial, since the malicious use of ICTs threatens the international economy. Cybercriminals worldwide have made use of increasingly innovative techniques to pilfer and launder billions of dollars over the past decade. Ransomware has proven to be especially lucrative for cyber criminals: while the average ransom demand increased by more than 500 percent last year, less than 10 percent of companies who pay the ransom fully recover their data. Cybercrime harnesses the force of the internet for evil and cost the global economy an estimated \$950 billion in 2020.

The third context concerns the use of ICTs for exploitation and abuse. In particular, the production and consumption of child sexual abuse material has increased exponentially due to the use of ICTs. As Pope Francis has noted “the use of digital technology to organize, commission and engage in child abuse at a distance, cutting across national borders, is outstripping the efforts and resources of the institutions and security agencies charged with combating such abuse; as a result, it becomes quite difficult to fight these horrific crimes effectively. The spread of images of abuse or the exploitation of minors is increasingly exponentially, involving ever more serious and violent forms of abuse and ever younger children.”² Consequently, the Pope has urged all Governments to “act against this delinquency as soon as possible.”³

These three categories are only some of the threats to international and national security, human dignity and rights, and the promotion of integral human development. Since cybercrime thrives in a borderless, often anonymous cyberspace, States must swiftly and forthrightly reach consensus to combat it and ending its many detrimental implications.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

² Cf. Pope Francis, *Address to the participants in the Congress on “Child Dignity in the Digital World”*, 14 November 2019.

³ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, 1 June 2016.