

Development gains unsustainable without cyber-diplomacy, UN official says

Hacking, child sexual exploitation and other cybercrimes could keep countries from reaching their development goals, warns a United Nations official who is urging Governments and private sectors to rethink how they work together.

“Keeping people safer online makes society safer,” said Neil Walsh, Chief of Cybercrime and Anti-Money Laundering Section at the UN drug and crime agency (UNODC) told *UN News*.

He noted that countering cybercrime creates stronger banking and stronger financial institutions, which leads to better economic prosperity. It also makes the world a bit safer women and girls – who consistently are at a higher risk for sexual exploitation online – and promotes gender equality.

These are essential targets of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are guiding efforts to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all.

Mr. Walsh said that by keeping people from the age of three all the way through their lives safe online, “you actually help business to function properly, you keep power grids and power safe, you create an element of behavior that allows people to bring all the benefits of the internet, open free and prosperous Internet to keeping them safe.”

That, he says, is what cyber-diplomacy is all about.

With recent concerns about hacking and ‘fake news’ impacting elections, and computer viruses knocking out servers, it is possible that cyber-diplomacy will be discussed at the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly.

In 2013, a group of UN experts [said](#) cyberspace could only become stable and secure through international cooperation, and that “the foundation of this cooperation must be international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

[Secretary-General António Guterres](#) in February [said](#) it was “high time” to have a discussion about the international legal framework in which cyberwars take place, and he urged the General Assembly to take it up.

“I don’t intend that the United Nations has a leadership role in this, but I can guarantee that the United Nations would be ready to be a platform in which different actors could come together and discuss the way forward,” Mr. Guterres said.