Celebrating the United Nations at 75

As the global custodian of technology in the pursuit of peace, the ICT4Peace Foundation congratulates the United Nations on its 75th anniversary. ICT4Peace was launched with the support of the Swiss Government in 2003. We helped define the framework for technology in peacebuilding through Paragraph 36 of the Tunis Commitment of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in 2005. In the same year, the preface by late UN Secretary-General H.E. Kofi Anan to 'Information and Communication Technology for Peace – The Role of ICT in Preventing, Responding to and Recovering from Conflict' published by the UN ICT Taskforce with ICT4Peace presciently noted that,

> *ICTs are also critical tools in peacekeeping operations, including in logistics. Moreover, ICTs can help address the root causes of violent conflict. By promoting access to knowledge, they can promote mutual understanding, an essential factor in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconciliation. ICTs also offers ways to reveal human rights abuses, promote transparent governance, and give people living under repressive regimes access to uncensored information and an outlet to air their grievances and appeal for help.*

Fifteen years on, the global relevance and enduring resonance of these observations do not surprise us. For close to two decades, ICT4Peace is privileged to be a trusted partner of and strategic advisor to the UN. We have helped the UN meaningfully embrace the growing potential of technology to strengthen peace, human rights and democratic governance. We work with a diverse range of UN agencies, departments and entities to explore, especially in recent years, significant socio-technological issues including,

1. The migration of communications to encrypted instant messaging apps and what it means for policymaking pegged to public data.
2. The resurgence of more tribal identities online, along with revisionist or exclusive histories, leading to the splintering of communities and an aversion to diversity.
3. Policies around tools and platforms used to define, deny or decry democracy and diversity that are often the very same used to strengthen civil society activism and advocacy.
4. The weaponisation of social media and possible consequences for democracy.
5. Aspects of and navigating a post-truth world, where veracity is valued but markers of it are increasingly evasive.
6. The role of traditional media as active agents of misinformation, leading to complex networked effects in news production and media ecologies.

From 2007 to 2016, ICT4Peace worked with the UN to develop and implement the UN Crisis Information Management Strategy (CIMS). This endeavour was recognised by the former UN Secretary-General H.E. Ban Ki-moon in his report to the General Assembly in 2010. The range of issues ICT4Peace provided input to and worked with the UN on is exhaustive and embraced challenges around social media, electoral integrity, humanitarian policymaking and technology in

peacebuilding. In 2018, a stocktaking exercise with the UN resulted in recommendations to better leverage institutional investments in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), predictive analytics, business intelligence (BI), and the Internet of Things (IoT).

In 2015 UN CTED invited ICT4Peace to moderate the first discussion with global IT companies at the UN Security Council on preventing the use of ICTs for terrorist purposes while respecting human rights. UN CTED and ICT4Peace subsequently co-launched the Tech against Terrorism platform and co-hosted the launching of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)in San Francisco.

Invited by the UN Peacekeeping to address senior UN leadership and other stakeholders during the Coronavirus pandemic, ICT4Peace outlined six key pillars critical for the institution to realise its institutional mandate in the post-pandemic world, especially around peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

ICT4Peace also works with the UN around peace in cyberspace and cyber-security policy, strategy and diplomacy. We support the UN by,

1. Engaging UN member states and organisations in international cooperation and negotiations.
2. Building capacities in developing countries for strategy building and engaging in UN and other international negotiations.
3. Developing and introducing policy recommendations and concrete solutions UN negotiations (OEWG, GGE), such the ICT4Peace Call on Cyber operations and Critical Infrastructure and the State Peer Review Mechanism on Foreign Cyber operations.

Addressing the UN in September 2020, Secretary-General of the United Nations H.E. António Guterres flagged the significant achievements of the institution as well as the growing pace and complexity of challenges facing the world. The UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights call on all of us to reaffirm our commitment to shared, democratic values. ICT4Peace strongly believes technology plays a crucial role in realising democratic goals and raising human potential.

We look forward to working with the UN family to strengthen our better angels and secure the best of who we can be.

Daniel Stauffacher and Sanjana Hattotuwa
ICT4Peace Foundation
October 2020