

Technology is changing how we monitor, understand and respond to conflict and to humanitarian crises

Thank you very much, Madam President, and thank you for this discussion today. We're also very grateful to the briefers for their contributions. As they illustrated, technology is changing how we monitor, how we understand and how we respond to conflict and to humanitarian crises around the world.

And, it's clear that, first, it can play a role in actually preventing the outbreak of conflict. If we can see risks in advance, then we can, and we should, act before the crisis hits. And, more timely decision-making enables early and preventative action – and that's an area I think this Council should explore more, in conjunction with the Secretariat. It's also why we are working with others, and with industry, to develop AI-driven conflict prevention models.

Secondly, during conflict itself, accurate situational awareness for UN peacekeepers on missions is essential. And, combining digital technologies, such as remote monitoring with improved intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance processes, can enable peacekeeping and monitoring missions to improve their understanding of threats and vulnerabilities on the ground. If we can get those drones, described by our colleague from the UAE, to help peacekeepers, instead of attack people, we can make progress.

Thirdly, technology also enables greater accountability. Social media, as we've heard today – including from our brilliant briefers, enables greater accountability. It empowers people to tell the world about the conflicts, as they are experiencing them, and make sure the world knows what is happening on their terms.

This means that the truth – including evidence of mass atrocities or violations of international humanitarian law – cannot be hidden by those who wish to hide it.

But, as we have also heard today, technology is being used by States, and by other actors, to suppress human rights, to spread disinformation, and as a tool in conflict. We see some States attempt to hide the truth by blocking access to social media or independent media sites. We saw this, as others have noted, last year when the military junta shut down the internet in Myanmar. We also see authoritarian regimes use surveillance technology to monitor and persecute their own citizens – denying them their human rights.

Technology can also be used by those seeking to destabilise – and this is particularly true in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, where Russia has conducted cyber-attacks and, as we have reported, used an online troll factory to spread disinformation and manipulate public opinion about their illegal war.

Fortunately, technology can also help us to combat disinformation. Russia tried to claim, and tried to claim again today, that bodies of victims lying in the streets of Bucha were a “staged provocation” by Ukraine. They suggested the Ukrainian forces had undertaken this staged provocation after they retook the town. But, satellite imagery proved that the bodies in the streets of Bucha had been there for several weeks, making it clear that they were killed during the period when Russian forces occupied the town.

Today, Madam President, rather than talk of a staged provocation, we were spun some new nonsense about obsolete artillery. This is another Russian tactic to attempt to distract us, and confuse us, and obfuscate. Layers of contradictory and competing lies are pushed out, so that people are confused and don’t know what to believe.

But, one should not be fooled by this. And, we look forward to the ICC undertaking a full investigation so that we can know the truth about what happened in Bucha, based on real evidence – and hopefully, indictments will flow from that – because combating misinformation and defending media who are committed to reporting the truth online, is critical to the proper functioning of the international system.

So, when the Russian delegation bemoan the fact that they are sanctioned on social media, or that their state propaganda outlets are blocked, they should not be. In the digital space, as in all spaces, we must strive to protect the truth from this new double-speak.

Madam President, in conclusion, we need to work together, including with civil society organisations, the private sector and other communities, to realise the benefits of, but also to counter the risks associated with, digital technologies. This will involve adapting institutions and upholding norms that are rooted in high standards, human rights, and democratic values.

This Council must ensure that existing frameworks and international law remain our guiding principles, as we do this.

And, if we do, we can ensure that digital technologies are a force for good and a transformative opportunity for sustaining peace and development.

Thank you, Madam President.