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UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL OPEN DEBATE – ‘PROTECTING THE PROTECTORS: TECHNOLOGY AND PEACEKEEPING’

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Statement by Australia

Australia pays tribute to all peacekeepers who have been killed or injured in the service of peace and calls for greater accountability for crimes against peacekeepers. The safety and security of our blue helmets, as well as the civilians they are mandated to protect, must remain the highest priority.

Australia commends India for prioritising the cross-cutting theme of technology in peacekeeping through this important United Nations Security Council open debate, “Protecting the Protectors: Technology and Peacekeeping” and for encouraging the Council to remain engaged on the implications of critical and emerging technologies on peace and security.

Technology can play a central role in addressing the challenges and threats faced by multidimensional peacekeeping missions, accelerating progress under all pillars of the Action for Peacekeeping initiative. A range of tools and capabilities exist that can improve mandate delivery and in-field services, reduce attacks against peacekeepers and address systemic challenges.

We have already seen the significant impact of technologies such as unmanned aerial systems, to enhance situational awareness and improve mission planning. Technology also has an important role to play in strengthening early warning and rapid response systems. This can improve a mission’s ability to protect civilians, including preventing and responding to conflict-related sexual violence and in situations of mass atrocity. Australia welcomes the “Strategy for the Digital Transformation of UN Peacekeeping” to fully utilise resources and support implementation of broader, system-wide reforms such as the Secretary-General’s Data Strategy.

At the same time, we must be mindful that technologies can also be used in ways that cause harm. The international community must work together to both build awareness of emerging opportunities and collaborate transparently in mitigating risks - including by expanding in-mission digital literacy to ensure the responsible use of technology and data. Training and capacity building partnerships will be increasingly important, and the multilateral system will continue to have a key role in addressing and shaping the impact of technologies.

One lesson of the COVID-19 crisis has been our ability to work across the digital domain and to continue to collaborate over vast distances. In the past year, Australia has leveraged technology to launch an online peace operations training platform for Indo-Pacific Troop Contributing Countries. Australia also invests in technology-based solutions, such as the roll-out of a telemedicine system and improved counter-IED capabilities within peacekeeping missions. We see technology as a key enabler to evaluate whole-of-mission performance and support a culture of continual improvement.

Australia will continue to advocate for digital transformation to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Women's full, equal and meaningful participation and decision-making in peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes are essential to promoting stability, social cohesion and sustainable peace.

The success of digital transformation in peacekeeping will be contingent on strong partnerships and leadership at all levels. Looking ahead to the upcoming Peacekeeping Ministerial in Seoul, Australia will continue to prioritise multilateral, cross-regional and regional partnerships, innovation, and mainstreaming of technology as integral to peace operations and building sustainable peace.