



**WORKSHOP ON
DEVELOPING AND HARMONIZING CYBER LEGISLATION IN THE ARAB REGION**

*14 – 15 March 2012
Cairo, Egypt*

Preliminary Information Note

Background

Most developed and some developing countries have modernized their legal and regulatory framework to meet the requirements that were brought forth by the adoption of new information and communication technologies (ICTs). Many countries in the Arab World, however, are still in the early development or enactment stages of cyber legislation. In order to narrow this legislative divide and to minimise the illicit and illegal use of cyberspace in the region, Arab countries need to follow a course of action that includes the formulation of cyberspace laws and the adoption of related organisational and management directives.

The importance of cyberspace laws stems from the need to regulate the use of online applications and the protection of users. E-government, e-commerce and e-health services require the enactment of laws that ensure the protection of private, personal, individual and institutional information. Cyber laws are foreseen to build user confidence and promote an enabling environment for the growth of ICT and building the information society. Furthermore, increased access of individuals from various social and cultural categories and levels has led some to misuse the cyberspace and utilize it to facilitate illegal acts. Thus, to prevent the fulfillment of harmful actions, a cyberspace law should identify what is to be considered a crime in the digital world.

With the above in mind, ESCWA became involved in cyber legislation with a study entitled “Models for Cyber Legislation in ESCWA Member Countries” that was published in 2007¹. The study reviewed the status of regional and international cyber laws and was complemented with a Template² that acts as a tool for the evaluation and development of national cyber legislations. The study and Template were discussed at the end of the same year during a workshop organized by ESCWA³.

ESCWA is currently in the process of implementing a project entitled “Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World”⁴ that will extend till mid 2012. The project aims at enhancing regional integration and strengthening the capacity of member countries to build a strong and sustainable ICT sector through the development of appropriate legal and regulatory structures. Within the framework of this project, ESCWA developed four reports providing an update of the status of cyber legislation at the sub-regional level⁵. Additionally, the project produced a set of directives designed to assist Arab countries in the development of national cyber laws and to harmonize cyber legislation on a regional level. The developed directives cover the following six areas: personal data protection; e-communication and

¹ESCWA. Models for cyber legislation in escwa member countries. 27 June 2007.

²<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/publications/edit/upload/ictd-07-8-e.pdf>

³<http://isper.escwa.un.org/FocusAreas/CyberLegislation/Template/tabid/201/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁴Workshop on “Cyber Legislation and its Implementation in the ESCWA Region” (Amman, 11-12 December 2007)

⁵<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=891E>

⁶<http://isper.escwa.un.org/FocusAreas/CyberLegislation/Projects/tabid/161/language/en-US/Default.aspx>

⁷The reports were based on the template where two reports covered the Gulf region, one covered North Africa and one the Levant region.

freedom of expression; e-signature and e-transactions; e-commerce and consumer protection; intellectual property; and cyber crimes. In February of 2011, a group consisting of legal and ICT experts reviewed, discussed and provided enhancements to the directives during an expert group meeting organised by ESCWA.

Ongoing activities of the project include the promotion and dissemination of these directives, the provision of related advisory services and the organisation of capacity building workshops to train relevant individuals on their application at the national level. To that end, a first Workshop on the ESCWA Directives for the Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation was organized in Beirut from 13 to 15 September 2011 targeting governments, ICT ministries and experts from the Arab countries.

A second workshop is planned in collaboration with the League of Arab States - the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Legal Council of Ministers, subject of this information note.

Objective

The Workshop on Developing and Harmonizing Cyber Legislation in the Arab Region aims at supporting Arab countries and building the capacities of legislators in the application of the ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives for the formulation of national cyber laws or the review/adjustment of existing ones. The workshop also aims at promoting the advantages of the harmonization of cyber legislation across the Arab region.

Topics

The main topics of the workshop will include:

1. A description of the ESCWA project entitled “Regional Harmonization of Cyber Legislation to Promote the Knowledge Society in the Arab World”;
2. A brief look at the status of cyber legislation in the Arab Region;
3. A detailed description of the “ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives” covering the following fields:
 - e-Communication and freedom of expression;
 - e-Signature and e-Transactions;
 - e-Commerce and consumer protection;
 - Personal data protection;
 - Cyber crime;
 - Intellectual property in cyber space;
4. Background and analysis of each of these six areas of cyber legislation;
5. Application of the ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives at the national level;
6. Guidelines for the enhancement and harmonization of cyber legislation at the regional level.

Outcomes

The expected outcomes of this workshop are:

1. Ability of Arab legislators review and enhance their national cyber laws to cover all aspects of cyber legislation;
2. Increased awareness of the status of cyber legislation in the Arab region and the need for its continuous development,
3. Dissemination of the contents of ESCWA Cyber Legislation Directives;
4. Improved understanding of the importance of harmonizing cyber laws at the regional level.

Organization

The workshop is being organised by the ICT Division of ESCWA in collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS) – the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Legal Council of Ministers and will take place from 13 to 15 March 2012 in Cairo.

Participants and Registration

Participants in this workshop will include legislative bodies and legal experts involved in the formulation of cyber laws in the Arab region as well as decision-makers and officials including ministries of justice, parliaments and related government institutions in addition to entities involved in the ICT domain in general

Participants are requested to fill out the registration form and to submit it by email to escwa-ictd@un.org and idlebi@un.org by **20 February 2012**.

Languages

Arabic is the working language of the workshop.

Travel and Accommodation

Participants are advised to inquire on their visa requirements to Egypt and to secure an entry visa ahead of their anticipated travel date.

ESCWA will cover the travel costs and/or daily subsistence allowance (DSA) of selected participants from invited organizations in the Arab region particularly those in the less developed countries of the region.

Additional information

Further information can be found at the following URL:

<http://www.escwa.un.org/information/meetingdetails.asp?referenceNum=1785E>

Submissions, inquiries and requests for additional information should be addressed to:

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