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Virtual Seminar on Information Technology Trends and Effects on National Security

Introduction

The **Whiteink Institute for Strategy Education and Research (WISER)** is a private institution established in 2018, which aims at capacity building for governmental and non-governmental, local, and international middle and senior level executives on effective security sector governance, strategic planning, development, and implementation. The institute furthers its training-base by engaging in world-class independent and bespoke research into critical domestic and international security challenges. This is with a view to contributing effectively to expanding global knowledgebase and promoting best practices in addressing all types and manifestations of threats to global peace, security, and stability from domestic and regional perspectives. It also hosts distinguished personalities, subject-matter experts and thinkers to speaking engagements on thematic security and allied areas of interest.

Drawing from an award-for-purpose grant by OSIWA, WISER is to deliver on a project entitled **Information Technology Trends and Effects on National Security**. The objective of the project is to address the question of citizens right to expression vis-à-vis the growing concern of governments on the use of cyberspace and information technology for terrorism, subversion, radicalization, electronic fraud, defamation, and other crimes that threaten stability, privacy and general safety and development.

Background

Democracy promises prosperity to humanity through its fine principles of respect for the popular, while in the same vein protecting the rights of the minority in striking balances to give all citizens a fair sense of inclusion and ownership. By these ideals, democracy promises protection of fundamental human rights to freedom of expression, choice, religious and cultural rights, gender, etc. In democracy the paradigm shift to human security is emphasized above the traditional state security position. While new technology and social media have expanded the space for civic engagement and interaction between the Government and the people, as well as among the people, there are however emerging challenges which have made this a contested space and often increased tension between citizens and the Government, and also among the citizens. The use of online spaces has implications for peace, security, stability and development. The project is to explore some of these issues.

The project will look at the question of freedom of expression vis a vis the growing concern of governments on the use of the cyberspace and information technology for terrorism, subversion, radicalization and various types of crimes, which work counter to the potential these platforms have for human freedom, progress and development. What does it mean to maintain a balance between the right to freedom of expression in the use of online spaces and the duty of the Government to protect its citizens against the potential harms occasioned by the misuse of these platforms in generating tensions, violence, and instability? The growth, flexibility, versatility and rapid innovations in areas of voice and image generation software

enhanced by Artificial Intelligence (AI), in use and abuse deepens the problem. There is increased contestation for freedom of the information space, used for assertion of rights and creativity between state regulators and civil society, which is getting more protracted with each side holding their grounds over the extent of liberties allowable in the space. Drone technology is also of much opportunities to progress human security and development, but its use in conflicts for kinetic and non-kinetic purposes, as well as for acquisition of images for subversion and intrusion into personal spaces are of mounting concern. What does it mean to maintain a balance between the right to freedom of expression in the use of online spaces and the duty of the Government to protect its citizens against the potential harms occasioned by the misuse of these platforms in generating tensions, violence, and instability? The growth, flexibility, versatility and rapid innovations in areas of voice and image generation software enhanced by Artificial Intelligence (AI), in use and abuse deepens the problem.

Purpose

The project - **Information Technology Trends and their Effects on National and Human Security** is designed around and in furtherance of an earlier conducted one by WISER and funded by OSIWA titled **The Intersection of National Security and Civic Space**. It will focus on the ecosystem of actors and provide for interaction among government, civil society and other stakeholders to unpack the current debates, arguments and contestations around the use of online spaces including social media, and evolving communication technologies and the implications these have for human security at the present and the future.

Fundamental Questions

It is expected that the following fundamental questions will be addressed:

1. What are the sovereignty implications and concerns of security organizations on the use of the cyber space?
2. Is there a rise in ‘Techno-Authoritarianism’¹ and what is its nature and reach?
3. Should the social media space be governed/regulated?
4. What are the controversial tactics, techniques, and procedures used by both state and non-state cyber citizens/netizens across social media?
5. What are the digital peacebuilding programs and frameworks used in Nigeria and their penetration in knowledge and practice?
6. Is there an international framework/best practice for the use of social media and communication technology in general?
7. How best can a balance be struck between the concern of states for protecting national security and for the promotion of citizens rights to freedom of expression, association and interaction on the cyber space?

Expected Outcomes

It is expected that at the end of the roundtable, participants will be better informed on the modern information technology devices and software, as well as the laws enabling their uses from various sectors of life and the contestations within the space aimed at defending the advancement of citizen liberties, being a fundamental democratic principle.

¹ The Rise of Techno-Authoritarianism. The Atlantic.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2024/03/facebook-meta-silicon-valley-politics/677168/>

Methodology

The discussion will take a conversational roundtable style held over two hours of which each panelist will make a 10-minute opening address. Subsequently, the floor will be opened to participants for interaction with the panelist, as well as among themselves.

The event will be held on Zoom, and will take place on Thursday, 22 February 2024, from 14.00 – 16.00 pm (GMT+1). Registration is at ‘Events Registration’ at www.whiteinstitute.com.

Panelists

The following will be the speakers:

1. Dr Nathaniel Allen – Africa Centre for Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Washington DC, USA.
2. Dr Daveed Gartenstein-Ross – CEO, Valens Global, International Strategy and Security, Washington DC, USA.
3. Ms Elizabeth Wuraola Kolade – PhD Candidate, University of Bristol, Bristol City, UK.
4. Ms Varsha Koduvayur - Manager, Valens Global, International Strategy and Security, Washington DC, USA.

Conclusion

Democracy promises equality, inclusion and the best beatitudes promoting of cohesive societies. WISER hopes that discussions from the seminar will provide rich recommendations on how evolving information technology tools, software and usage are important in progressing and protecting citizens right to expression and interaction to the best limits promoting safety, security and protection of the privacy for all. This fundamentally being within the ambit of the law and wellbeing of all promoting of the ideals of democracy and the value of good governance for peace, security, stability and development.



Brig Gen Saleh Bala (Rtd)

President and Founder

WISER

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Abuja-Nigeria