



Discussion of the 2023 Counter Ransomware Initiative with DNSA Anne Neuberger

On Wednesday, November 1st, the Biden Administration was joined by the 50 members of the International Counter Ransomware Initiative (CRI) for the International Counter Ransomware Initiative 2023. To celebrate the Initiative, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) hosted a panel event on Friday, November 3rd. Cybersecurity professionals from all sectors gathered at the organization's headquarters to hear from Anne Neuberger, Deputy National Security Advisor for Cyber and Emerging Technologies, along with David Koh, Commissioner of Cybersecurity and Chief Executive of Cyber at the Security Agency of Singapore, and Jamila Akaaga Ade, the head of the Cybercrime Unit of Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Justice.

The discussion was heavily focused on the CRI's policy statement declaring that member governments should not pay ransoms. Following introductions of the three speakers by moderator and CSIS Senior Vice President James Lewis, Neuberger led the audience in a discussion of the International Counter Ransomware Initiative's history and goals of working to build a more secure and safe cyberspace.

Neuberger highlighted what CRI deems to be the biggest and most disruptive cyber threat of ransomware, highlighting the Biden Administration's three goals: first, improving cybersecurity at home; second, disrupting the attackers and the infrastructure they use to conduct their attacks

and launder ransom; and finally, building an international coalition, working with partners around the world, because this truly is a global threat.

Koh went on to share a perspective that shaped CRI's approach to urging countries to avoid paying ransoms. "This is not just an operational or technical issue. It's a law enforcement issue. It's a legal issue. You have to deal with other countries, and, ultimately, the recognition is that it is a financial issue. It is driven by the money flows. As some have said, why are the ransomware criminals active in this space? Because this is where the money is" he stated.

Later, Lewis posed audience questions to the speakers, on topics from the motivations behind the anti-ransom guidance to its consequences. The final question asking the speakers about the CRI's next steps asking, "What are the key deliverables for CRI next year? And the second is: What are the key deliverables for the CRI over the next – CRI over the next five years?"

Neuberger answered referencing the CRI's week in DC for the Initiative. "We're now capturing the action plans from the last two excellent days of discussion... We'll be recruiting countries to lead because, as we said, we really aim for that diversity – a big country and a small one, countries from different regions working together on these problem sets". In regards to the future, Neuberger stated, "We are hopeful that we can tackle the ransomware problem so we – the International Counter Ransomware Initiative doesn't need to exist in five years. Absent that, real outcomes and deliverables that move us forward in our pursuit will be what matters."

The efforts outlined by all three representatives of the CRI demonstrated the developing focus on developing capabilities to disrupt attackers and the infrastructure they use to conduct their attacks, improving cybersecurity through sharing information, and fighting back against ransomware actors.