

Cybercrime now 'number one' threat: Europol chief

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Security guards stand in a street on the opening day of the Global Conference of Cyberspace in The Hague on April 16, 2015

Cybercrime has become as big a threat to Europe's security as terrorism, the head of the continent's policing agency warned Friday.

"The threat online is huge. It is now the number one security concern, alongside terrorism," Europol chief Rob Wainwright said.

"It's become a global problem and we urgently need global instruments to deal with it," the continent's police czar told AFP.

Wainwright was speaking on the sidelines of a global cyber conference ending in The Hague, which focused on issues such as Internet freedom, safety and security.

More than 1,500 delegates from almost 100 countries, civil society and tech industry giants such as Microsoft, Facebook and Cisco gathered for the two-day Global Conference on CyberSpace (GCCS) in the Netherlands.

Delegates on Thursday launched a forum designed to serve as a platform for countries to share expertise in the fight against [cyber threats](#), including hacking attacks and data protection.

With backers including the United States, Britain and the Netherlands, the Global Forum on Cyber Expertise will for the first time bring together the experiences of a wide range of online companies and players including Microsoft and Europol.

"This is an extremely important initiative that will help many countries, particularly in the developing world, build up their capacity to tackle the issue," Christopher Painter, US State Department Coordinator for Cyber Issues told AFP.

Painter said Washington was deeply concerned about the rise in [cyber attacks](#) reported in recent months.

These include an attack against Sony Pictures as well as the theft of credit card and health information from tens of millions of Americans.

Forty-two countries and regional groups including the European Union,

the African Union and the Organization of American States have also already signed up to the forum, which will be based in the Netherlands, Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders said.

The details of its operation will be fleshed out in coming months.

Wainwright said "if we have learnt anything about how the Internet has changed criminal activity in Europe and America, it is that we were unprepared for it."

"The Internet has raced ahead of our offline world," he said.

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