



**CCW Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems  
(LAWS)**

**April 2016**

**National Statement by Ireland**

Mr Chairman,

I would like to express my Delegation's appreciation for the excellent work which you and your team have undertaken in preparation for this expert meeting. We welcome your Food for Thought Paper, as well as the stimulating papers which have been submitted by other Delegations. These provide an excellent basis for our further consideration of the challenges posed by emerging technologies which may be used for the development of autonomous weapons systems.

Ireland considers that the previous two expert meetings have successfully identified many of the technical questions raised by LAWS, but they also highlighted the fundamental legal, ethical and societal concerns associated with the development of such weapons systems. Ireland looks forward during this

meeting to working together on increasing our knowledge of these issues. We also hope to reach a common understanding on how we can make progress in meeting the challenges they present.

As I indicated in our Statement to the meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Conventional Weapons last November, we also look forward to progressing consideration of this matter on an urgent basis. Our view is that November's CCW Review Conference should elaborate and adopt a mandate for a group of Governmental Experts to agree recommendations which would guide any possible future development and use of these weapons systems. These recommendations should, in the first instance, ensure that any development of autonomous weapons systems is fully compliant with the current rules of IHL.

Mr Chairman

Ireland's strong position in relation to LAWS is that all weapons should remain under meaningful human control. We agree that it is important, both for clarity and for moving the discussion forward, to give consideration to the technical and defining characteristics and principles of these weapons systems. We note that the paper submitted to this meeting by Switzerland has some useful suggestions in this regard, and we look forward to debating this question in more depth at the session tomorrow.

However, and notwithstanding the importance of an agreement regarding definitions, we believe that the debate should continue to be centred on compliance with International Humanitarian Law and also with International Human Rights Law. The technical aspects of our debate, and any development of these technologies for use in warfare, should take place against that framework. In this respect, we welcome the inclusion in the programme of work of a session on human rights and ethical issues.

We recall that the objective of the CCW and its Protocols is to regulate or to ban the use of specific categories of conventional weapons which are excessively injurious or have indiscriminate effects. As the drafters of our Convention recognised, constant evolution and technological progress in this field require constant vigilance to ensure that new weapons, means and methods of warfare are not in violation of relevant international law, including international humanitarian law. Article 36 of Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions is of particular relevance here, and our meeting can consider how the application of Article 36 by States Parties could play a role in our future work on this question.

However, the debate on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems reaches far beyond technical and legal complexities, raising fundamental questions about the role of humans in taking lethal decisions in armed combat. The decisive questions may well be whether such weapons are acceptable at all, and if so, under what conditions.

Ireland also has concerns regarding eventual use of these technologies outside of traditional combat situations, for example in law enforcement. This is one reason why we see value in discussing these questions in other relevant fora such as, for example, the Human Rights Council, as the issue of autonomy in weapons systems is also relevant for International Human Rights Law.

Ireland believes that the concept of meaningful human control is critical to the international community's consideration of the questions arising from the development of LAWS. In this regard we would like to note the many excellent research papers which have been developed over the past year, and which have contributed to a better understanding of the troubling and complex issues raised by the prospect of these weapons systems. Ireland notes in particular the valuable work of UNIDIR and is pleased to have been able to make a contribution to the second phase of their project on the Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies.

These papers, and other important work carried out by Civil Society and Academics, continue to be of great assistance to States Parties in developing positions and moving forward on this challenging theme for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Ireland would like to thank those involved for their work and tireless efforts in keeping this issue to the forefront of the international community's attention.

Mr Chairman,

We look forward to the deliberations of the next days. In view of the many serious questions raised by LAWS, Ireland would strongly support an agreement on a framework for taking our work further. In this context, we are hopeful that the 2016 Review Conference will agree on the establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts with a mandate to make substantial progress on this issue.

Thank you.