

Ireland National Statement by
Ambassador Michael Gaffey, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the
United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva,
to the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons
Systems (LAWS)
Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
Geneva, 9-13 April 2018

Mr Chairman,

At the outset, may I express our appreciation for your skilled leadership as chairman of the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS and our continued support for its important work under the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).

Ireland aligns with the statement made by the European Union.

Ireland has a clear, long-standing policy of promoting effective multilateral cooperation, the rule of law and good global governance. We consider it an imperative to seek multilateral solutions to global challenges and threats to international peace and security, including those arising from new technological developments and advancements.

I would add that Ireland has also long championed the need for gender equality in all disarmament discussions. There is no doubt that our deliberations would be enhanced through greater gender diversity in participation – and we believe this applies equally to our current deliberations on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS).

Ireland has actively participated in and followed the debates on the issue of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems since 2013. We warmly welcome the recent statement here in Geneva by the United Nations Secretary General on his consideration of an initiative to give stronger impetus and direction to the global disarmament agenda, which will include consideration of the risks and challenges posed by the weapons of the future.

Mr Chairman,

Ireland welcomes the extension of the mandate of the Group of Governmental Experts this year. It is our hope that the planned two week-long GGE working sessions will provide an opportunity to further build understanding, exchange views and explore areas of convergence.

In our closing statement at the 2017 GGE meeting, we concluded that consensus seemed to be emerging around a number of concepts. These include the requirement for full compliance with International Humanitarian Law, and the recognition of the need for a human element in the use of lethal force, expressed

in a variety of ways including meaningful and effective human control, human oversight, supervision or appropriate levels of human judgement. However, we also noted the significant divergence between States on a number of key issues.

Ireland has maintained a consistent position in relation to LAWS. We have prioritised three main substantive issues on which we believe the work of the GGE should be focused and we look forward to making some progress on these issues this week.

The first of these is the need for a working definition, or a characterisation, of the scope of systems under consideration. We need to bring greater clarity to what we understand by LAWS, especially with regard to the nature of autonomy and the value of the concept of lethality in this context. During the 2017 GGE we heard a variety of interpretations from States regarding the nature and scope of autonomy. There is a clear need for further work in order to achieve an acceptable measure of agreement on this key issue. We hope that the GGE will make significant progress on this issue this week.

The second substantive issue is the nature of the human machine-interaction. This has been identified as a key factor in determining the legitimacy of future weapon systems.

And third, future work needs to clarify what additional measures may be required to ensure that such weapon systems will comply with all the relevant rules of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

Mr Chairman,

We are encouraged by the consideration which has been given to this issue by the CCW States Parties and Observers and by our partners in civil society and academia. Indeed, it is our view that the role of civil society has played a vital role in bringing this process forward. Given the rapid pace of technological change it is now urgent that real progress is made through the Group of Governmental Experts, and we look forward to fruitful discussions on these salient issues this week.

Thank You.