



CCW Meeting of States Parties

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Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative of Ireland

Patricia Cullen

Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

Mr President,

We would like to thank the French and German Chairmen of the two expert meetings held in 2014 and 2015, for their excellent conduct of these meetings and valuable Summary reports. The expert meetings successfully identified many of the technical aspects raised by LAWS, but also highlighted the fundamental legal, ethical and societal concerns which development of such weapons systems would present. I would also like to acknowledge here the tireless work of civil society which, in this -as in so many other fields- has been highly influential in highlighting LAWS and bringing this issue to the attention of the international community.

Ireland's starting position in relation to Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems is that weapons should remain under meaningful human control. While we agree that it is important for clarity and in order to help move discussion forward, that we give consideration to the technical and defining characteristics and principles of these weapons systems, nonetheless, we feel the debate should be firmly located within International Humanitarian Law and in International Human Rights Law; and that the technical aspects of our debate, and any development of these technologies, should take place within that framework.

In that regard, the mandate of the CCW and its Protocols is to regulate or ban the use of specific categories of conventional weapons that have effects which trouble the conscience of humanity. As the drafters of our Convention recognized, constant evolution and technological progress demands of us a constant vigilance to ensure that new weapons, means and methods of warfare are not in violation of relevant international law, including international humanitarian law.

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 under the principles of humanity, 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, and 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 the concept of meaningful human control is critical to the international community's consideration of the questions thrown up by 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 are contributing to a better understanding of the complex and disturbing issues raised by the prospect of these weapons systems. Ireland notes in particular the valuable work of UNIDIR; we were pleased to make a contribution to the second phase of UNIDIR's project on the Weaponization of Increasingly Autonomous Technologies.

UNIDIR's papers, and other important work by Civil Society Actors and Academics is, as always, of assistance to States Parties in developing positions, and moving forward with our work on this challenging theme for the 21st century. Ireland would like to thank those involved for their work and for their activism in continuing to insist upon bringing this issue to the International community's attention.

Ireland would like to conclude by noting the various suggestions made as to how we might develop a framework for taking forward the future debate on LAWS. We agree with those speakers who have mentioned the need for greater transparency and the use of Article 36 Weapons Reviews in this context.

Finally, Ireland would fully support the establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts, to meet for at least one week in 2016 and make recommendations to the 2016 Review Conference on further steps, in order to address an issue which is emerging as a major theme in 21st century weapons development.

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