

Ireland National Statement
GGE on LAWs: Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
Intervention on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

To be delivered by H.E. Mr. Michael Gaffey
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Ireland
to the United Nations and Other International Organisations
GENEVA

Wednesday 15th November 2017

Mr Chairman,

Ireland aligns with the statement made yesterday by the European Union.

[Firstly, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as chair of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons. I want to assure you of my delegation's full cooperation and support. We look forward to constructive and fruitful discussions under your able leadership.]

Mr Chairman

Ireland has actively participated in and followed the debates on the issue of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) since 2013. We welcome the convening of this first formal meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS as a new stage in the international community's efforts to address the technical and legal complexities of emerging autonomous technologies.

Ireland was frankly disappointed that the financial challenges that have plagued the CCW led to a situation wherein the GGE is only able to meet this year for a single week; and that the meetings, originally planned for August 2017, had to be cancelled. In this vein we actively encourage any states that are in arrears to pay their contributions and thus ease the financial strain under which the CCW has been operating. We are also very much indebted to the ISU for their sterling work in assisting you Chair in preparing this meeting.

Given the rapid pace of technological change it is urgent that real progress can now be made through the GGE, and we look forward to fruitful discussions on the salient issues. We hope that consensus will emerge on a series of substantive recommendations on LAWS, to be put forth to the Meeting of State Parties. Such recommendations should ensure that autonomous weapon systems are compliant with the International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law frameworks as applicable.

Ireland has maintained a consistent position in relation to LAWS. It is our belief is that all weapons should remain under effective and meaningful human control and that this principle is critical to the international community's consideration of the questions arising from the development of LAWS.

Notwithstanding our core position, our participation in the debates has demonstrated to us that there is an urgent need for clarity in relation to LAWS, in particular in relation to the elaboration of a working definition and the technical characteristics and principles of operation of these weapons systems.

We consider that a working definition will help guide our future work on LAWS. Without a working definition, we are at risk of losing our focus and making our scope of work unyielding. We welcome the Working Papers which have been submitted to the meeting in this regard. We sincerely hope that the GGE makes significant progress on this issue.

The debate on LAWS raises fundamental questions about the role of humans in taking lethal decisions during armed conflict. This meeting enables us to build on the discussions we have had in this respect at previous meetings and to make recommendations also with regard to how effective and meaningful human control can best be ensured as autonomous capabilities in weapons systems continue to develop.

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.

The discussions which have taken place on LAWS have also highlighted to us some other important connected issues, which we feel should be explored further.

For instance, Ireland has concerns regarding eventual use of these technologies outside of situations of armed conflict, for example in law enforcement, and as such Ireland sees 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.

I thank you Mr Chair.