

CCW: 2019 Meeting of High Contracting Parties

New Zealand Statement on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

Thank you Mr Chair.

Firstly, please allow me to express my delegation's appreciation to you, as well as Mr Ljupčo Jivan Gjorgjinski of North Macedonia for his efforts in chairing the Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. As we consider the GGE report, I reiterate that New Zealand continues to find the Group a valuable forum to discuss the incredibly complex set of issues that LAWS poses for the future of warfare and the application of IHL.

Despite the significant compromises made by many, including New Zealand, in agreeing the report, which reflects a rather modest level of agreed ambition, the consensus reached so far highlights, at least, a commitment by all to keep moving discussions forward. We look forward to work proceeding to consider issues involved in a "normative and operational framework" on LAWS in time for the 2021 Review Conference.

This will require the group to tackle with determination issues around human control and other aspects of the human element in LAWS, as well as to deepen our understanding of technical and operational constraints on LAWS required to give effect to human control and IHL. We should be aiming for outcomes in these areas that will complement and build on the progress which the Group has made in the area of guiding principles and IHL aspects.

New Zealand wishes to place on record our strong preference for an outcome-oriented approach for future GGE meetings, with a focus on areas where the Group can add value in articulating how disciplines could be applied to the development and use of LAWS. This will require a focused agenda and adequate time for discussion. For these reasons, we see the inclusion of the word "development" in the chaussette of paragraph 26 as entirely appropriate, and we see thirty days of meetings over the next two years as the minimum period of time required to engage in substantive discussions on this important issue.

In this regard, Mr Chair, we welcome the Non-Paper on Financial Measures, which is being considered under item 13, as an attempt to improve the stability of the Secretariat's support to the Convention, and to deal with financial issues related to the Convention and its Protocols, which impact on our ability to do meaningful work inter alia on the issue of LAWS.

We look forward to working with the new Chair of the GGE and other delegations on the next phase of our consideration of LAWS. We also welcome the recent "Alliance for Multilateralism" initiative and its potential to give greater visibility to this issue and the GGE's work. New Zealand intends to sign on to the statement relating to LAWS. I would also like to welcome the ongoing work of the ICRC on this issue, which helps to support our discussions.

Mr Chair, the rapid pace of technological change and growing public concern about the weaponisation of autonomous technologies means that the eyes of the world are on our GGE – looking for it to reach meaningful outcomes in the area of LAWS. We hope delegations will make the most of future sessions of the GGE to achieve progress on this important issue.

13 November 2019