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**CCW STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA AT THE MEETING OF EXPERTS ON
LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS (LAWS), GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
APRIL 2015**

Chairperson,

My delegation would like to thank you for convening this informal Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), in the context of the purpose and objectives of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). My delegation wishes to assure you of its full support and co-operation as we begin our discussion on this important issue.

Chairperson,

Since the decision to begin discussion on LAWS in 2013, South Africa has been supportive of the view that the CCW would be the correct forum for this discussion but given the cross-cutting nature of the LAWS issue, it is not the only forum that has a legitimate interest in this issue. Last year's Informal Meeting of Expert provided States Parties with greater insight into LAWS but there are still many questions that remain unanswered. The concept of "meaningful human control" is something that my delegation is supportive of. In our view, there should always be meaningful human control in the question of life and death. At present we are told that there are no LAWS but we need to deepen our understanding of the degree of human oversight or control that "autonomous weapons" and even those of that are reportedly "semi-autonomous" would require.

Defining the characteristics of LAWS will help bring us closer to a definition, which is essential in reaching a common understanding as to the very nature of these weapons. South Africa once again reaffirms that all new means and methods of warfare should comply with the law of armed conflict. The use of such a weapon systems would need to comply with the fundamental rule of International Humanitarian Law, including those of distinction, proportionality and military necessity, as well as their potential impact on human rights.

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Should LAWS also be regulated for their possible dual use applications? In this regard, the various components that make up these weapon systems probably have a wide range of peaceful applications. In addition, controlling such components would probably have a large measure of overlap with existing control regimes, such as the Missile Technology Control Regime. In our view, this is an issue that would require further study.

The questions posed by the Chair in his working paper raise some pertinent issues and challenges that will be crucial when it comes to making a decision on how best to move forward. In this regard, States Parties probably need more time and information to come to a conclusion. For instance, should the call by some experts and States for a moratorium until a decision is taken be answered? However, given that moratoria are generally unilateral in nature, would a political declaration work better? Or should we rather pursue some rules of the road which could allow for flexibility to deal with an as yet undefined weapon system. In essence, the question would be whether we should rather put in place some rules of the road until there is a better understanding of the various concepts?

Chairperson,

In conclusion, let me assure you that my delegation stands ready to support you and your team towards a successful and fruitful meeting and we stand ready to examine these and other questions that would require further clarification and discussion.

I wish to leave you with one last thought from Albert Einstein, "It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity".

I thank you.

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