



Federal Republic of Germany
Foreign Office

CCW EXPERT MEETING

LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

Geneva, 13 – 16 May 2014

Statement on Ethics and Sociology of LAWS by Germany

Mr. Chairperson,
distinguished colleagues,
ladies and gentlemen,

Notwithstanding all technical, legal and military deliberations with regard to lethal autonomous weapon systems, there is one fundamental ethical and sociological question we have to answer. Do we want machines to take decisions about life and death autonomously and completely independently from human intervention?

At first glance, the answer to this seems very easy: Only very few people would answer that yes, they do want machines to take this decision. That is the “ugh-factor” we have heard about before. However, things are, as usual, not as easy as they seem. A proper answer needs a careful analysis of very different aspects.

One of the questions in this session is, whether LAWS will be socially acceptable, and it is a difficult one. One could first ask whether robots in general are socially acceptable. We do not think that one can give a very static answer to this question. The understanding of what is socially acceptable or not has drastically evolved all

through the industrial revolution with the appearance of new technologies. Many things that have been unimaginable for previous generations are completely normal nowadays.

New technologies are becoming more and more part of our daily lives and thus they change incrementally our understanding of what is socially acceptable. The same is true for weapons: new weapon systems change our understanding of what is possible but also of what is acceptable in war.

As there are no lethal autonomous weapon systems to date, we have the time to consider whether we want to accept this change, whether we deem it necessary to take action and if we do so how we could regulate such systems.

Mr. Chairperson,
ladies and gentlemen,

The German government has decided that it does not want a situation where we get used to the idea of autonomous machines deciding about life and death without respecting ethical aspects. We do not want to have weapon systems that decide on the use of force against humans without any human intervention or at least supervision. There always needs to be meaningful human control.

And what this “meaningful human control” means, we will have to discuss, also taking into account moral reasoning.

Thank you very much for your attention.