

Remarks by Sweden at the Expert Meeting on LAWS in the CCW on 13.05.2014

(General Debate)

(courtesy phrase)

- Sweden appreciates very much this opportunity to take a first look at the questions around lethal autonomous weapon systems, LAWS. We do not see any such systems yet in existence, nor can we foresee a situation in the near future in which a weapon system would be operated without any human control or oversight. However, as States we have an obligation to assess the legality of new weapons, and we therefore welcome this discussion. We also welcome a continued discussion of this issue, as necessary, within the framework of CCW. Allow me to make a few short points of a general nature.
- Firstly, while it is true that many systems with various degrees of automation are being used or developed by states, it is not clear to us that this entails a move toward systems that would give full combat autonomy to machines. We do see a future possible development that may lead to increased automation as a support to the human operator within given parameters, be they boundaries in time, space or otherwise.
- Secondly, a difficult issue is the threshold at which a weapon should be considered “autonomous”. Machine automation/autonomy exists on a continuum. An autonomous weapon implies one that is fully outside the control of a human. We very much doubt that this is a desirable development for a military force. As a starting point, Sweden believes that when it comes to decisions on the use of force against persons, humans should never be “out of the loop”.
- Thirdly, it is important to underline that even if LAWS are referred to as “autonomous”; States are legally responsible for their use. If violations occur that are attributable to a particular State, that state is responsible according to the rules of State responsibility and international humanitarian law (IHL). Sweden intends to return to this issue in more detail at a later point.
- We are ready to hear the opinions of other States and of organisations, to advance our common understanding of these complex issues.