

Statement by Amnesty International
CCW Informal Meeting of Experts On Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

Thank you, Ms Chairperson.

Amnesty International views the CCW mandate as a positive step towards establishing an internationally agreed response to Autonomous Weapons Systems, or AWS. The rapid development of these weapons systems risks changing the nature of warfare, and it is important that the implications of their development are carefully examined. We believe that AWS operating without meaningful human control would not be able to comply with the rules of international humanitarian law, including the requirement to distinguish adequately between combatants and civilians, to take necessary precautions to minimize harm to civilians, and to evaluate the proportionality of an attack.

While we understand that the international human rights law framework will be discussed in tomorrow's sessions, we believe it important to raise this in the context of the current discussions on IHL. Amnesty International foresees that the use of autonomous weapons systems (AWS), including less-lethal AWS, would result in unlawful killings and injuries both in situations of armed conflict, where international humanitarian law and international human rights law apply, and in law enforcement operations, where only human rights law applies.

The questions surrounding the development and potential use of lethal and less-lethal AWS outside of armed conflict – and the ability of such systems to comply with international human rights law and related international policing standards – are at least as daunting as those related to their use on the battlefield. The development, deployment and use of lethal and less-lethal AWS outside armed conflict raise serious human rights concerns, threatening the right to life, the right to security of person, the right to human dignity, and potentially undermining other human rights. Furthermore, the use of AWS would pose serious challenges in ensuring access to remedies and in holding accountable those responsible for serious violations.

Amnesty International believes that urgent and due consideration needs to be given to the human rights implications of lethal and less-lethal AWS. This is particularly important in light of our current discussion on weapons reviews under Article 36, which do not apply to all weapons and equipment and do not examine how they might be used in policing and law enforcement operations. Some weapons may be lawfully used in armed conflict but not in policing and the converse is also true (e.g. tear gas and dum-dum bullets cannot be used in armed conflict but may lawfully be used in some circumstances in police operations). Therefore we believe that the human rights considerations of AWS must be effectively and actively addressed throughout these discussions.

Thank you for your attention.