



## **REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE**

### **2016 MEETING OF EXPERTS ON LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS (LAWS)**

#### **Opening Statement by Ambassador Yvette Stevens**

Mr Chairman,

Sierra Leone would first of all like to congratulate you for your reappointment as Chair of this third meeting of experts that has been set up by the CCW meeting of State Parties to discuss further the questions related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention in preparation for the 2016 Fifth Review Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Convention.

Sierra Leone's interest in the subject originated from the report of the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions at the 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council, which resulted in the decision to refer the matter to the CCW. In this connection, Sierra Leone is pleased that this matter is being given the attention it deserves by the CCW. While such weapons might not yet exist, the fast pace of development of new technologies might render the possibility of producing them in the near future not out of reach. The attention to this subject is therefore timely.

One thing that has become clear from our discussions is the complexity of the subject. The Food for Thought paper that you, Mr Chairman have prepared, based on the Expert Group Meetings of 2014 and 2015, amply captures the important questions which need to be addressed at this expert group meeting and would serve as a useful guide to move us forward on this subject. The papers submitted by Canada, France, Germany, Holy See and Switzerland are also useful to enrich our discussions this week.

Autonomous weapons systems do not necessarily have to be new systems, per se. Increasing automation of the functions of existing systems could render them autonomous and should be considered in our discussions.

When an existing system gets to the stage when it could be considered as autonomous, it should be also subjected to the provisions of Article 36 of the Additional Protocol of the IHL.

We have heard conflicting views as to whether LAWS could be in conformity with IHL. My delegation trusts that all States would like to operate within the provisions of International Humanitarian Law and would take steps to respect Article 36 of the Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949, relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts, in relation to new weapons. This article states, and I quote, “In the study, development, acquisition or adoption of a new weapon, means or method of warfare, a High Contracting Party is under an obligation to determine whether its employment would, in some or all circumstances, be prohibited by this Protocol or by any other rule of international law applicable to the High Contracting Party”. The Emphasis here is on *international law* and not just IHL.

We should also be mindful of the Marten’s Clause, which states:

“Recalling that, in cases not covered by the law in force, the human person remains under the protection of the principles of humanity and the dictates of the public conscience.”

In addition, we should bear in mind that any weapons system that are developed might fall into the wrong hands, including non-state actors for which accountability would not be easily established and could be a good reason why these weapons should not be developed in the first place.

My delegation is optimistic that with the cooperation that has so far been enjoyed by this initiative, we are moving towards a fruitful outcome - an outcome that would address all the concerns that are being raised in relation to the development and deployment of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. In this connection, Sierra Leone supports the establishment of a Governmental Group of Experts to more comprehensively address this issue and the forthcoming Fifth Review Conference will provide an opportunity to put it in place.

Under no circumstances should the taking of the life of human beings be entrusted to machines, however well programmed. Sierra Leone therefore believes that the Human Rights Council should remain seized on the human rights aspects of LAWS, while respecting the mandate of CCW.

Mr. Chairman,

I thank you.