



**CCW STATEMENT BY SOUTH AFRICA AT THE MEETING OF EXPERTS ON
LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS (LAWS), GENEVA, SWITZERLAND
2014**

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Chairperson,

Allow me, at the outset, to thank you for convening this informal Meeting of Experts to discuss 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 on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). My delegation wishes to assure you of its full support and co-operation as we begin our first discussion on this important issue.

Chairperson,

The CCW grew from a wish of the international community to ban or restrict the use of certain conventional weapons that cause unnecessary suffering or have indiscriminate effects. As a State Party to the Convention, South Africa remains fully committed to the achievement of the objectives of the CCW and the full implementation of the obligations arising from the Convention.

The pace of scientific and technological progress in recent years has resulted in new means and methods of warfare. Nevertheless, it is clear that the development of such new means and methods must comply with the law. Those who would use autonomous new technologies deliberately to carry out unlawful attacks would be as much in breach of the law of armed conflict, as would those who would seek to accomplish the same with conventional weapons.

However, it is difficult to define the term “new technologies”, save to say that the use of such new technologies in war will make it more difficult to attribute responsibility when violations of humanitarian law occur. This will primarily be as a result of technical difficulties in identifying those responsible because of resulting complications in establishing a chain of responsibility.

Chairperson,

The issue of new and emerging technologies is therefore one that is filled with questions and significant uncertainty as some of the technology has yet to mature. Yet, we need to take into account the rate at which technology is advancing and that it is only a matter of time before we see some of these weapons being deployed on the battlefield. Therefore, this meeting could not be timelier.

The development of LAWS poses serious questions and there are many issues on which clarity is required. This includes definitional certainty as to the notion of autonomous and semi-autonomous weapons systems. While fully autonomous weapon systems are not being used currently, the future use of such weapon systems raises a whole range of issues to be considered. Of primary concern to my delegation are the humanitarian implications of their use and related ethical considerations. One of the key questions in this regard that should be of concern to all of us is whether these new technologies of warfare would be compliant with the rules of International Humanitarian Law, including those of distinction, proportionality and military necessity, as well as their potential impact on human rights.

These questions will grow in relevance and urgency, as fast as these technologies continue to advance and develop. The lack of human intervention in “autonomous” weapons raises serious concerns and even those systems that are reportedly “semi-autonomous”, do not necessarily provide for sufficient time for humans to make an intervention. These are some of the questions that require our careful consideration.

Chairperson,

My delegation looks forward to a productive meeting which provides us with the opportunity to learn more about this subject in order to better guide our further deliberations during the Meeting of High Contracting Parties in November 2014.

In conclusion, Mr Chairperson, let me assure you that my delegation stands ready to support you and your team towards a successful and fruitful meeting.

I thank you.