



SIERRA LEONE

**Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain
Conventional Weapons
Which May Be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to have
Indiscriminate Effects
(CCW)**

**2017 Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons
Systems (LAWS)**

(13 to 17 November 2017)

**GENERAL STATEMENT
By Ambassador Yvette Stevens**

Mr Chairman,

I would like to start by congratulating you on your election to guide our discussions on this subject and to thank you for the Food for Thought Paper, which should guide our work at this first GGE meeting. Sierra Leone regrets that the time allocated for the work of the GGE in 2017 has been cut short.

Sierra Leone would like to express its gratitude to the CCW for pursuing its consideration of the subject of Legal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). Consideration of LAWS was brought to the CCW, following a report on the subject that was presented by the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions at the 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council in 2013, when Sierra Leone was a member. The Special Rapporteur in his report, requested, inter alia, that an internationally agreed upon framework on the future of LAWS be established. As a past member of the Human Rights Council, Sierra Leone's interest in LAWS is thus focused on the human rights aspect of their use.

While we agree that advances in science and technology should be encouraged and applauded, we believe that their applications need to be critically reviewed

to ensure that their uses do not breach international laws and that they conform to ethical and moral standards and respect fundamental rights. It is in this light that the considerations on the topic by CCW should be viewed. The discussions of LAWS in a formal inter-government format is timely, in the light of the recent accelerated development in applications of artificial intelligence.

We were warned by the technical experts in the panel discussion of yesterday, that, in principle, crude forms of LAWS could be deployed now, and what was in question would be their conformity with international law, which we are told would be difficult, if not impossible to achieve in the foreseeable future.

We trust 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.

In addition, we need to ask ourselves, whether in terms of LAWS, voluntary self-regulation is enough to guard against their indiscriminate use. My delegation believes that this GGE should consider the necessity for additional measures to address this question.

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 is 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 they should not be developed in the first place.

The CCW has now held three informal experts meeting on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, in which Sierra Leone has participated and served as a friend of the chairs. These have revealed, without doubt, that these weapons deserve to be given the very close attention of this body, which was created for this purpose. We have heard arguments and counter-arguments, but we have also read publications and participated in events, which address some of the claims that we

have heard in the informal expert group meetings. These include the claims of cost-effectiveness that could be gained through the use of LAWS, the safety of their applications in marine environments among other claims. The need for an international agreed framework on the future of LAWS, as originally recommended by the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions at the 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council, is increasingly apparent.

Sierra Leone looks forward to a frank debate at this first formal meeting, a common understanding of terminologies and the state-of-the-art, and a clear indication on the way forward. We expect that the different aspects – technology, legal, ethical and military will be brought together and provide a clear path for consideration of this subject and for taking decisions, that might possibly include a legally binding instrument, that would respect, *inter alia*, the human rights, including the right to life, of concerned persons.

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.