

General statement by Sweden at the 2016 CCW Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

Mr. Chairman,

Let me begin by congratulating you on your appointment as Chair of our Meeting and by pledging our full cooperation and support. Sweden very much appreciates your thorough consultations in preparation of this meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

Sweden believes in an approach to disarmament and international security that puts human beings in the centre of policy. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) is an expression of such an approach. We believe that the CCW and its protocols present an effective means to respond in a flexible way to future developments in the field of weapons technology. We also look forward to continue working closely with the ICRC, and note that civil society has many valuable contributions to make to our work. Sweden continues to attach great importance to NGO participation in the CCW meetings. Against this background, we welcome the opportunity to continue our discussions on lethal autonomous weapon systems, LAWS, in this forum.

Sweden very much appreciated the interesting discussions at last year's Expert Meeting on LAWS. As our Foreign Minister has previously underlined, we believe that humans should always bear the ultimate responsibility when dealing with questions of life and death. As States we have an obligation to assess the legality of new weapons, and we will therefore welcome a continued discussion not least of these issues within the framework of the CCW.

Mr. Chairman,

We are still lacking a clear definition of the term LAWS. There has been a tendency in the discussion of definitions to focus on technical issues. This approach is problematic given the dual-use nature of the technology involved and its application in both civilian and military systems. I am pleased to note that SIPRI – the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute – will this year continue to focus some of its research efforts on LAWS, and specifically on mapping the possible development and production of autonomous weapon systems and related civilian technologies. Sweden is happy to be one of several co-sponsors of this study. We understand that SIPRI will present some initial findings during our meeting this week.

However, at the bottom of the issue lies the fact that a legal review of new weapons, means and methods of warfare is crucial. Sweden set up a Delegation for International law monitoring of Weapons projects already a long time ago. This delegation acts as an

independent authority and is not part of the government. If the weapon projects assessed by the Delegation do not meet requirements within international law, the Delegation shall encourage or urge the authority that submitted the matter for examination to take appropriate measures. The Delegation reviews all weapons used by Swedish authorities. In this way we ensure that we fulfil the requirements in IHL – in particular art. 36 of the Additional Protocol I – on implementing legal weapons reviews. Any possible autonomous weapons systems, as well as any other new weapon, or means or method of warfare, would be scrutinized in accordance with these procedures and this legal framework.

Sweden has also recently re-appointed a National Commission for International Law and Disarmament. Similar Commissions in the past have proven to be very useful to advance our thinking on issues of international law, not least international humanitarian law, and the Government expects the new Commission to consider some topical issues where IHL and disarmament issues cross paths. LAWS will be one of them, and I am pleased that the Chairman of the working group for the LAWS issue of the new Commission, Dr. Ola Engdahl, is part of our delegation here in Geneva. Dr. Engdahl is also a member of the Delegation for Weapons Projects and will be making a few remarks on the Swedish experiences from working on weapons reviews later during our discussions.

Mr. Chairman,

An important question for our present meeting is how to move forward beyond this discussion. Like many other Parties, we would support a decision to create, at the Review Conference in December this year, a Governmental Group of Experts to further examine the issue of LAWS. We hope that we might arrive at some common understanding so that the Expert Meeting could make a recommendation in this direction. Given the uncertainties in relation to many of the questions and issues regarding LAWS, we see that one promising issue for exploring in a GGE could well be the implementation of weapons review processes, including identification of best practices or benchmarks for such reviews. In this context, let me say that we agree with the direction suggested by Switzerland in their working-paper “Towards a ‘compliance-based’ approach to LAWS”, submitted to this meeting.

Sweden remains open to discussing several possible ways forward, with a view to finding one that can enjoy consensus. We would be happy to work with other interested States to move forward on creating a broad-based and forward-looking mandate for a future GGE.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.