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

Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems
Geneva, 9-13 April 2018

TOP 6 (a) - Characterization of the systems under consideration in order to promote a common understanding on concepts and characteristics relevant to the objectives and purposes of the Convention

Statement Austria

Mr Chair,

We agree that a common understanding is important to achieve substantial outcome of our discussions. We thank you Mr Chair for outlining various approaches on how to arrive at a common understanding. The working definition should rather be a reference point than a final definite definition, which would have to emerge from a negotiation process later.

Technical cumulative approaches seem lengthy and not particularly effective, as technology is fast evolving and such an enumerative approach would most probably be not exhaustive and would be easily outdated. Progress in science is fast and the avenue is not promising.

While we will probably not be in the position to predict future development in detail, it seems appropriate to establish what is the necessary amount of human control necessary. For self-learning systems predictability seems a particular challenge, as i.a. bias in the original algorithm might get intensified over a learning period. The task at hand is difficult enough, so we should not mix it with the question if LAWS do exist or do not .

We believe that negative definitions might be helpful to narrow the subject matter down. There seems to be a general understanding that that no systems without meaningful human control should be developed. This criterion enjoys broad support.

My delegation sympathizes with the approach that a first starting point to look at autonomous weapon systems in terms of level of autonomy or human involvement in critical functions.

When it is argued that certain types of weapons should be excluded from our working definition, it would be important to understand why we would want to exclude particular weapon systems. Often it was argued that the degree of human involvement was sufficient. This argument demonstrates that rather than technical enumerative approaches we should focus on the level of meaningful human control.

We have heard useful remark on lethality, lethality is the effect that will see later, but rather the capability.

We welcome the paper that sums up the approach, the approach taken by the ICRC seems a good basis that any weapon system with autonomy in its critical function, which is similar to the Dutch working paper and the US 2012 us definition. Seems to be promising point to further dwell on this.