



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

**UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN  
AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Statement for the General Exchange of Views at the Meeting of the Group of  
Government Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems,  
Monday 9 April 2018**

Mr Chairman,

1. Firstly thank you for all your preparation and your continued Chairmanship for this meeting of the Group of Government Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. The UK is pleased that sufficient funding has been received this year allowing these important and timely discussions to take place within the CCW, which the UK believes is the forum best suited to continuing and advancing LAWS discussions. The UK fully aligns itself with the statement made by the European Union.
2. With a view to informing our discussions, I reiterate the UK's definition of autonomy:  
  
"An autonomous system is capable of understanding higher level intent and direction. From this understanding and its perception of its environment, such a system is able to take appropriate action to bring about a desired state. It is capable of deciding a course of action, from a number of alternatives, without depending on human oversight and control, although these may still be present."  
  
In line with other states, the UK believes that remotely piloted and automated systems are not LAWS; and that LAWS do not currently exist, in line with the UK's definition.
3. The UK's position on the use of lethal force is that there must always be human oversight and authority in the decision to strike. The UK has no intention of ever developing lethal systems that could select and engage targets without any human control.
4. The UK believes existing International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is the applicable legal framework for the assessment and use of all weapons systems, including autonomous

systems, in armed conflict. The fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality, necessity and humanity are at the core of compliance with IHL. It is the UK's position view that those principles, and the requirement for evaluating the risks implicit in the use of lethal force, can only be assessed and applied by a human.

5. Article 36 of 1977 Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions requires States to determine whether new weapons, means or methods of warfare may be employed lawfully under International Law. The United Kingdom takes this very seriously, and has published its weapons review procedures online in a document that sets out how the UK fulfils its Article 36 obligations. We hope that sharing our approach may encourage full universalisation of Article 36 weapons reviews, and may assist other states in developing and sharing their review procedures and protocols.
6. Legal Weapons Reviews ensure that the effects of new and novel weapons are assessed and understood in detail. We believe that Article 36 Weapons Reviews are already the correct means to assess any lethal capability and its use, as required by Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Convention.
7. The UK does not support a pre-emptive ban on LAWS. Further discussions are required to ensure common understanding of the subject. There could also be merit in furthering a shared understanding of the capability, application and assessment of systems that exist now, even though the UK considers that these are not LAWS. However, we should be mindful of unintended consequences to the development of technologies that would be beneficial in other fields. It is therefore important that this GGE shall discuss the characteristics of LAWS, and give further consideration to the human element in the use of lethal force. The UK believes that human control is the key factor to both discussions. The UK therefore strongly encourages all States to share their national policies and approaches on autonomy, the human-element in the use of force, Article 36 Weapons Reviews and LAWS, in order to inform and progress the debate in the valuable forum of the CCW this week.
8. The CCW brings together diplomatic and military experts, alongside technical experts and specialists from academia and civil society. This diverse gathering is critical to ensuring that the international community can consider a varied range of viewpoints, and so that States can work together to build common understanding and formulate a mutually acceptable approach to this important subject.

Mr Chairman,

9. In closing, we look forward to continuing the rich discussions under your leadership throughout this week. Thank you.