

Statement by Ambassador D.B. Venkatesh Varma,
Permanent Mission of India to the CD

At the CCW Informal Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons

11 April 2016

Mr Chairman,

We would like to convey our appreciation for your efforts as Chair of the informal meeting of experts on LAWS in 2015 and this year. We acknowledge your report, prepared under your own responsibility, on the informal meeting of experts on LAWS held in 13-17 April 2015, and the Food-for-Thought Paper circulated on 17 March 2016 that lists out sets of questions for each session of our meeting. We also appreciate your clarification that the list of questions is not meant to be exhaustive or exclusive, since a programme of work that is unduly prescriptive may not be the most appropriate for this stage of our discussions. We also note the Working Papers submitted by Japan, Switzerland, Canada, France and the Holy See.

2. India has stressed the continued relevance of the CCW in addressing challenges posed by the development and use of new weapons and their systems with respect to international law in particular international humanitarian law. As such, we supported discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) held in 2014 and 2015 and their continuation this year on the basis of the mandate agreed at the 2015 Meeting of States Parties to the CCW.

3. In our view, a discussion on LAWS should include questions on their compatibility with international law including international humanitarian law as well the impact of their possible dissemination on international security. Our aim should be to strengthen the CCW in terms of its objectives and purposes through increased systemic controls on international armed conflict in a manner that does not widen the technology gap amongst states or encourage the increased resort to military force in the expectation of lesser casualties or that use of lethal force can be shielded from the dictates of public conscience.

4. The 2015 discussions- at the informal Meeting of Experts in April and the Annual CCW Conference in November offered an opportunity to explore in depth various dimensions of LAWS – legal, technical, and ethical issues and possible impact on international security. However, it is not clear whether we have moved closer to a common understanding of LAWS

in terms of all the elements of our mandate- to look at LAWS as an emerging technology in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention.

5. In our view, there continue to be wide divergences on key issues – definitional issues, mapping autonomy - whether distinctions can be drawn between oversight, review, control or judgement or how they would apply to a new weapon system from the time of its conception, design and development to production, deployment and use or for that matter when does a weapon system cross the line to become a new weapon or its use constitute a new method of warfare. In addition there appears to be lack of clarity on means and ends on the issue of national reviews. These are complex questions with no easy answers. In these circumstances, it may be prudent not to jump to definitive conclusions. At the same time, we cannot ignore the inexorable march of technology, in particular that of dual use nature, expanding the autonomous dimension of lethal weapon systems, while keeping in mind the CCW remains a relevant and acceptable framework for addressing such issues of concern to the international community.

6. The 2015 Meeting of States Parties to the CCW decided that '*the meeting of experts may agree by consensus on recommendations for further work for consideration by the 2016 Fifth Review Conference*'. We see merit in continued consideration of LAWS on the basis of an agreed mandate, and look forward to working with other States to work out an agreed recommendation to the Fifth Review Conference on the way ahead for consideration of this issue in the CCW in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention.