

**Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the
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)**

21-23 November 2018, Geneva

Statement of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Agenda item 8: Autonomous weapon systems

The ICRC welcomes the progress made by High Contracting Parties at the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on “Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems” in addressing the unique legal questions, and ethical concerns, raised by weapons with autonomy in the 'critical functions' of selecting and attacking targets. We thank the Chairperson of the GGE, Ambassador Amandeep Singh Gill, for successfully guiding its work and its adoption of a solid, and very useful, report in August.

As evident from discussions at the GGE, there is general agreement among States that human control – be it qualified as ‘meaningful’, ‘substantive’, ‘appropriate’, ‘sufficient’ or ‘effective’, or ‘appropriate levels of human judgement’, or ‘human involvement’ – must be retained over weapon systems and the use of force.

Significantly, the GGE report affirms the applicability of international humanitarian law, and the importance of a human-centred approach to the issue of autonomous weapon systems, which recognizes that “human responsibility for decisions on the use of weapons systems must be retained since accountability cannot be transferred to machines” (*IV.A Possible Guiding Principles*), and that “human responsibility for the use of force must be retained” (*IV.C Human element in the use of lethal force*).

As the ICRC has stressed during GGE meetings, there is a strong legal, ethical and military operational basis for human control. Clearly, the loss of human control over the selection and attack of targets in armed conflict could risk significant humanitarian consequences for civilians and violations of international humanitarian law. A loss of control would also raise profound ethical concerns about the erosion of human responsibility for decisions to kill, injure or destroy.

As set out our Working Paper (WP3) submitted to this Meeting – “The Element of Human Control” – the **ICRC believes States must now tackle the fundamental issue of what human control means in practice**. Considering core questions of human supervision, predictability and reliability, and operational constraints will help guide necessary work by High Contracting Parties to develop internationally agreed limits on autonomy in weapon systems.

Specifically, the **ICRC recommends that the 2019 GGE is dedicated to reaching common understandings on the elements of human control over the critical functions of weapon systems that are needed for legal compliance and ethical acceptability**. The ICRC believes this should be reflected explicitly in the GGE’s mandate.

In the view of the ICRC, this approach will facilitate the identification of a standard of human control that is clear, robust and practical, and that can hold up to future developments. This task is increasingly urgent as military technology developments that remove, or reduce, human control over the critical functions of weapon systems are threatening to outpace deliberations.