

ICRAC Closing Statement to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons Informal Meeting of Experts at the United Nations in Geneva

Written version of statement to be delivered by Dr. Matthew Bolton, Membership Secretary of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control

Version 3.1 – Text in **BOLD** represent verbal version.

Thank you Madame Chairperson,

Distinguished Delegates,

The International Committee for Robot Arms Control – or ICRAC as we are known – would like to commend the German Ambassador for convening this meeting with such distinguished experts on autonomous weapons systems. **ICRAC would like to express appreciation to the States Parties and distinguished experts for engaging in a fruitful exchange of views.** ICRAC has called for an international process on autonomous weapons systems since 2009 and is delighted to now be a part of it.

ICRAC is particularly grateful to the Chair for assembling a group of experts representing greater gender diversity. We hope that this is indicative of a new trend of allowing previously excluded voices – of women and experts from the Global South – to be heard in this forum and others dealing with international peace and security.

ICRAC urges States Parties to continue their work in this forum and others, starting with an open-ended Group of Governmental Experts and moving to substantive negotiations on a preemptive prohibition of all weapons systems that lack *meaningful human control over all individual attacks*. Increased transparency and better weapons reviews, while crucial, are not enough. We would welcome a more transparent discussion of how current semi-autonomous weapons systems, automated defense systems, and remotely-operated weapons systems are kept under meaningful human control. While transparency is good as a general principle, it is not on its own a sufficient means to regulate autonomous weapons, especially given the challenges to its effective realization.

We welcome the views of Professor van den Hoven on value sensitive design, and the need to include explicit consideration of moral reasoning and human values in the design process of all technologies, including weapons systems. However, the responsible design of technologies is not in itself a sufficient means to mitigate the multiple and grave risks posed by autonomous weapons systems. Engineers operate in a policy and legal environment that is defined by states. As such, it is incumbent upon the States Parties to clearly communicate the requirement that all weapons must be kept under meaningful human control through a binding instrument.

Autonomous weapons systems would threaten international peace and security. As outlined in ICRC's leaflet, distributed to States Parties this week, ICRC experts fear the threats of proliferation and arms races, lowered thresholds for armed violence. ICRC fears that the unpredictable interaction between opposing complex autonomous weapons systems, coupled with increasing speed, could spiral out of control and trigger accidental conflict or indiscriminate civilian harm.

Autonomous weapons systems raise legal and ethical concerns. Peer-reviewed research by ICRC experts has shown for the foreseeable future, autonomous weapon systems could not comply with international humanitarian law and international human rights law. A precautionary approach is needed.

A preemptive ban would honor the Marten's Clause, following the guidance of the principle of humanity and the dictates of public conscience in developing new law. The delegation of violence to a machine – whether lethal or less lethal – is a violation of human dignity. Last month, a Model UN conference of 2,500 undergraduate students from around the world – meeting in the UN General Assembly Room in New York – were commended by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for passing resolutions calling for a ban on autonomous weapons systems. ICRC urges states to follow this ethical leadership shown by the world's youth, as well as Nobel Laureates, clergy and faith-based organizations, concerned scientists, ethicists and the civil society Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

As a result, ICRC calls on States Parties to:

- 1) Develop national policies in favor of a ban on autonomous weapons systems,
- 2) Commit to moratoria on development, production and use, as recommended by UN Special Rapporteur Christof Heyns,
- 3) Support an international mandate leading to substantive negotiations on a preemptive prohibition, either by a CCW Sixth Protocol or other means, and
- 4) Ensure that discussions on autonomous weapons systems are open and inclusive especially of women, experts from the Global South and civil society.

ICRC looks forward to the ongoing process on autonomous weapons systems and offers the expertise of its members – scientists, technologists, academics, lawyers and policy experts – to the CCW's States Parties.

Thank you, Madame Chairperson.