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Statement by the International Committee for Robot Arms Control

Convention on Conventional Weapons Meeting of Experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems
United Nations Geneva
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I am speaking on behalf of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (or ICRAC as we are known), a founding NGO of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. We would very much like to thank Ambassador Simon-Michel for suggesting that this informal expert meeting take place and for inviting two of our member to take part as expert presenters. We would also like to thank all of the states here for agreeing and for taking part.

ICRAC was founded in 2009 by a group of like-minded scholars who were deeply concerned about the automation of warfare. At that time we issued a call to the international community to urgently commence a discussion about robot weapons and the prohibition of the development, deployment and use of armed autonomous unmanned systems. And thanks to all of you here we are discussing those very issues.

ICRAC very much hopes that this meeting will result in a process of international negotiations on the issue of autonomous weapons systems. This process should lead to a new legally binding instrument as soon as possible.

ICRAC has grown since its beginning but still mainly consists of academic experts from different fields including robotics, physics, philosophy, international law, psychology, artificial intelligence, computer science, peace research and international relations. As such we have a wide and varied range of concerns about autonomous weapons. Over 80% of our members have doctoral or Juris Doctor degrees. ICRAC members have carried out research on various aspects of autonomous weapons, and published their results in scientific journals as well as at conferences and in mass media. As such, ICRAC has contributed to many expert and policy meetings over the last year since the campaign to stop killer robots began.

We would also like to stress that ICRAC experts are available and willing to provide technical expertise to the High Contracting Parties as they engage in discussions about fully autonomous weapons systems.

ICRAC has urged the international community to seriously consider the prohibition of fully autonomous weapons systems in light of the pressing dangers they pose to global peace and security. We fear that once they are deployed, they will proliferate rapidly and interact in ways that could create results none of us is prepared for.

ICRAC has grave concerns about the limitations of the technology of autonomous weapons to comply with international law and their inherent unpredictability. Last year we coordinated the circulation of a "Scientists Call" to ban fully autonomous weapons systems, signed by more than 270 computer scientists, engineers, artificial intelligence experts, roboticists and professionals from related disciplines in 37 countries, that said: "given the limitations and unknown future risks of autonomous robot weapons technology, we call for a prohibition on their development and deployment. Decisions about the application of violent force must not be delegated to machines."

ICRAC urges nations to be guided by principles of humanity in its deliberations on existing and emerging weapons technologies – taking into account considerations of human security, human rights, human dignity, humanitarian law and the public conscience, as well as the justified worries about robotic arms races and proliferation. This means meaningful human deliberation and control over the use of violence must remain the cornerstone of any eventual global policymaking on robotic weapons.

ICRAC welcomes this informal expert meeting on lethal autonomous weapons systems. We believe the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons represents a useful forum. However, in light of our concerns, ICRAC respectfully submits that:

First, it is not enough to consider only "lethal" autonomous weapons. We urge a broad discussion that considers all autonomous weapons systems, given that arming autonomous systems with so-called "sub-lethal" or "less-than-lethal" weapons could still cause unnecessary suffering, and

Second, it is not enough to consider only armed conflict or international humanitarian law when discussing autonomous weapons. We urge nations to consider the human rights implications of the development and potential use of these weapons in any situation, including domestic policing, border control and internal law enforcement.

In conclusion, ICRAC seeks a preemptive ban on the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons systems. We hope that these talks result in a legally binding instrument banning these weapons and look forward to working with you to make this happen.