

**Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)**

**Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems**

**27-31 August 2018, Geneva**

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

**under agenda item 6(d)**

Thank you Mr. Chair.

At the outset, let me, on behalf of the ICRC, thank the many delegations that have taken the floor under this important agenda item to share their views.

The ICRC appreciates just how far the discussions in the CCW on autonomous weapon systems have come in the last five years. Rapid developments in military applications of robotics and artificial intelligence technologies lend urgency to these ongoing discussions and to achieving progress in identifying and building on common ground, with the aim of ensuring that decisions to kill, injure and destroy remain with humans, and that such critical decisions are not effectively left to sensors and software.

Autonomous weapon systems raise **concerns about loss of human control of the use of force**, which could have serious consequences for both civilians and combatants in armed conflict.

The ICRC's view is that these characteristics of **autonomous weapon systems raise unique issues and challenges for legal compliance and for humanity** and, in turn, raise the question of whether new internationally agreed policies, standards or rules are needed.

The meetings of this Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) in April, and again this week, were encouraging in the **general agreement among all States that human control must be maintained** over weapon systems and the use of force. This **"humancentred" approach** should now guide the further work of this GGE to set limits on autonomy in weapon systems and ensure human control is maintained.

We've heard several proposals put forward by States on how to achieve this goal, including:

- the **development of new law**, in particular the negotiation of a legally binding instrument (a Protocol) to either prohibit autonomous weapon systems, or establish a positive obligation of human control;
- a **political declaration**, reaffirming the applicability of international law (in particular, international humanitarian law (IHL)) and stating human control must be maintained; and
- improved implementation and best practices for **national legal reviews of new weapons**.

Independent of the policy response chosen, **all approaches share the same requirement for core substantive work**, namely that States must **determine the type and degree of human control** in the use of weapon systems with autonomy in their critical functions that is needed to ensure compliance with international law, in particular IHL, and ethical acceptability.

In the ICRC's view, focused work by States will help **determine what** (minimum/sufficient /effective/meaningful/appropriate) **human control means in practice**. It should be driven by the necessity to **preserve human judgement and responsibility in targeting decisions**.

This approach will enable States at the CCW to:

- 1) **Specify a positive obligation for human control over weapon systems and the use of force**, in line with legal obligations and ethical considerations;
- 2) **establish internationally agreed limits on autonomy in weapon systems**, that address legal, ethical and humanitarian concerns; and
- 3) **identify “autonomous weapon systems of concern”** that fall outside these limits, and would therefore be unlawful and/or unacceptable.

The advantage of this approach, which focusses on a positive obligation of human control, in contrast to a negative approach (a prohibition), is that we would avoid getting stuck with debates about definitions and technical characteristics. Focussing on a positive obligation of human control would also, in our submission, result in a standard that withstands the test of time (as you have called for Mr. Chair), as it is focussed on the needed level of human control over weapon systems and the use of force, rather than on technological characteristics.

The ICRC is encouraged that an increasing number of States are supporting this approach.

Thank you.