



Federal Republic of Germany
Foreign Office

CCW EXPERT MEETING
LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

Geneva, 13 – 17 April 2014

General Statement by Germany

Mr. Chairperson,
distinguished colleagues,
ladies and gentlemen,

Let me express our thanks to the staff of the UN Office in Geneva for the preparation of this meeting. The decision to hold a Second Meeting of Experts on the emerging issue of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, building on the good results of the first round of discussions in May last year under French chairmanship has found our entire support from the very beginning and we stand ready to contribute to a successful outcome of our work in the upcoming days. We have gained substantial ground by the discussions last year. A common understanding on certain fundamental principles emerged from the discussions, the unconditional respect for International Humanitarian Law being certainly the main pillar for any further discussions. Moreover, we understand that there was a common understanding regarding the necessity to exercise appropriate levels of human control over the use of force. Please allow me at this point to reiterate the German position on that matter:

We will not accept that the decision to use force, in particular the decision over life and death, is taken solely by an autonomous system without any possibility for a human intervention in the selection and engagement of targets.

These two principles will guide us in our discussions, defining at the same time the limits we should take care not to cross in the further development of autonomous weapon systems.

However, many complex questions which were rightly addressed in our first experts meeting remain still open. The discussions on defining elements for LAWS did not yet come to an overarching consensus; neither did the question on the applicable criteria under IHL, pursuant to which the use of LAWS shall be deemed lawful or not. We therefore welcome the continuation of the debate and hope that this Meeting of Experts will allow for a deeper insight into the essence of LAWS, into the risks connected with emerging technologies, in particular in the arms sector, and possibly for the discussion of a common resolve to prevent unintended consequences or to counter risks connected with those developments.

There cannot be an easy judgment of the balance between risks and benefits in technological developments in general. Similarly, no simple answer regarding the effects of technological progress in military weapons systems is to be expected. One reason is that technology develops in unforeseeable ways. Another difficulty for the establishment of general principles lies in the fact that it comes in virtually unlimited varieties of shapes and modes of action. For good reasons, fundamental principles of International Humanitarian Law mostly avoid specifying particular technologies. They are in principle applicable independently of the weapon, means or method of warfare and define the difference between their legitimate and illegitimate use by focusing on the effect of the deployment. Any possible understanding in respect of LAWS will have to comply with these principles. As this is the second Informal

Meeting of Experts, we warmly welcome the deepening of the debate. We also believe it is time to get into a substantive discussion. We are ready to contribute to proposals which could be helpful in the establishment of an international consensus. Confidence Building Measures, including a reasonable level of transparency in the treatment of LAWS and relevant national procedures, may be a one step into that direction. We are however open to other approaches as well.

We are looking forward to the discussions. We are convinced this Meeting of Experts has the chance to develop great relevance also in the consideration of future handling of arms control issues, as ubiquitous technological progress will ever more dominate the debate on weapons systems. The multitude of its facets makes it particularly important to address the issue properly, taking objectively into account the continuous spectrum of technological progress by avoiding cinematographic projections. Germany is ready to identify and face straightforward possible risks related to increasingly complex systems. Germany will stay vigilant; the red line leading to weapon systems taking autonomous decisions over life and death without any possibility for a human intervention in the selection and engagement of targets should not be crossed.

We finally hope to reach common ground as how to proceed further in the discussions on LAWS. It is clear that we are still at the beginning of a process in the context of the CCW. It may be useful to identify now the items where common ground can be reached and where the discussions could be continued in a concrete and result-driven way. Germany will be happy to submit proposals in due time.

Thank you for your attention.

