

**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**

**Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems
Geneva, 9-13 April 2018**

**General Exchange of views
Statement Austria**

Ambassador Thomas Hajnoczi

Mr, Chairman,

Austria aligns itself with the EU statement delivered. In our national capacity I wish to add some remarks of particular importance.

We are pleased to see you, Ambassador Gill chairing our group's work on the important matter of lethal autonomous weapon systems. I assure you of the full support of my delegation.

The second GGE on LAWS comes at a time when technological applications involving high degrees of automatization and autonomy are readily available. In fact they are increasingly part of our societies. The learning and development curve regarding automatization, robotics and artificial intelligence seems to follow an exponential pattern. Humankind is seeking benefits from these developments while exploring potential uses in various different areas.

LAWS are a particular case in point. In fact, the CCW's engagement on lethal autonomous weapons stands testimony to the high level of concern about the risk that such weapons entail. We have come to realize that with regard to weaponry and warfare the rapid progress and the use of autonomous technologies raise a series of substantial ethical, legal and security concerns.

LAWS have the potential to challenge the most basic principles of international law, in particular human rights and international humanitarian law. It remains to be proven that an autonomous weapon system could respect the fundamental IHL principles of necessity, proportionality and distinction. Our legal system is based on human behaviour and accountability. The absence of meaningful human control for critical functions would undermine the existing international legal framework and entails substantial international security implications. The operationalization of LAWS might contribute to regional and international instability or lower the threshold for the use of force.

The November GGE reconfirmed the applicability of international law to autonomous weapon systems and that the choice of means of warfare is not unlimited. The wide range of new technologies involved and complex interrelated questions lead to a high level of uncertainty not only in our discussions here but also regarding the implementation of the international normative framework. In order to address uncertainty it is essential to establish clear common understandings and a regulatory framework.

Mr. Chairman,

It is not only timely but urgent to address potential policy responses to the substantive challenges ahead of us. After having discussed diverse questions related to LAWS within the CCW since 2013 as well as in other relevant fora, my country has come to the conclusion that the legal, security and ethical challenges arising from the possible evolution and use of LAWS as a new type of weapon as well as a new type of warfare require a clear regulation. Austria shares the view that with regard to LAWS Art. 36 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions is applicable as to any other weapons. However, in our view it is necessary to set a clear common standard as to whether certain lethal autonomous weapon systems are prohibited or not. Therefore, Austria is in favour of establishing a legally binding instrument in order to prohibit lethal autonomous weapon systems that are not under meaningful human control. Such a legally binding instrument should be enacted before LAWS are becoming operative and we as the international community would have to respond to an incident. Austria thus supports the early start of negotiations on such a legally binding instrument on the prohibition of lethal autonomous weapon system that operate without meaningful human control over critical functions.

This week offers us the opportunity for an in-depth exchange of views. As an outcome of our past deliberations the concept of “meaningful human control” represents the best starting point for the international community to address the issue. The preservation of meaningful human control over all weapons systems must remain at the core of our considerations. We believe the time has come to centre our discussions on this shared understanding of the necessity of meaningful human control. We are looking forward to devote more attention to the discussion as to what level of human control is necessary in which functions of autonomous weapon systems.

Mr. Chairman,

In order to tackle the challenges in the context of LAWS the need to closely cooperate among all stakeholders is evident. In this spirit, we are looking forward to fruitful discussions. In closing, let me also underline Austria’s appreciation for the contributions of the ICRC and civil society, including industry and academia, which have relevantly enriched our discussions.