Statement by

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Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

Consideration of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on emerging technologies in the area of Lethal autonomous weapons systems (GGE on LAWS)

United Nations, Geneva

13 November 2019
Thank you, Mr. Chair.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate Mr. Gjorgjinski again for the excellent manner in which he conducted our deliberations at the GGE throughout the past year.

Israel found this year’s GGE on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS to be very insightful. It proved once again that the CCW is the appropriate forum to discuss the subject of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). At the same time, it is important to remain within the agreed mandate for discussion and stick to the objectives and purposes of the CCW.

The fact that High Contracting Parties succeeded, once again, in agreeing by consensus on a substantial report that contains significant elaborations, illustrates that – despite the complexity of the subject matter and the different approaches of the Parties – reaching shared understandings is attainable. It also demonstrates that the existing mandate continues to enable Parties to make concrete progress in the discussions, while maintaining flexibility, which is crucial due to the futuristic nature of the issue. As the discussion revolves around weapons that do not yet exist, with more unknowns than knowns, incremental progress is the only responsible way to go. We call on all High Contracting Parties to participate actively in future GGE discussions and to include relevant experts in their delegations, as this issue requires more and more in-depth expertise.

In regards to the timeframe, we will find it difficult to support the proposal to expand the work of the GGE to 30 days. Previous meetings of this GGE have proven to be both efficient and productive in our view. The GGE’s time frame needs to take into account national and CCW resource considerations, with a view to create an efficient and fruitful process.

Mr. Chair,

The experts’ meetings thus far have helped promote a greater understanding on the issue of LAWS. We note that there seems to be wide agreement on certain notions, such as that IHL applies to the development and use of LAWS, and that humans will always be responsible for the employment of LAWS and should be held accountable for IHL violations in accordance with international law. Another agreement pertains to that fact that the discussions should not hamper progress in research, development and use of autonomous technologies for peaceful purposes, but rather promote responsible innovation and use of such technologies. Many other shared understandings can be found in the report agreed upon in the August GGE.

At the same time, there are still many issues in which there are still differences of opinion. One of them is the characterization of LAWS. Another issue is the appropriate type and level of human judgment throughout the various phases of the weapon’s life cycle, as well as the suitable terminology in this regard.
Looking forward, it seems clear that further in-depth discussions are required, including on human-machine interaction in the various phases of the weapon’s life cycle. In our perspective, human judgment will always be an integral part of any process regarding LAWS. LAWS will operate as designed and programmed by humans, and will be another means to effectuate the intention of commanders and operators.

Another specific issue that seems to necessitate further discussions is weapon reviews – a touchpoint that reflects an important avenue of human input, and directly concerns compliance of the weapon with international law.

It is important to keep in mind the military and humanitarian advantages that may be associated with LAWS, both from the operational as well as the legal aspect. These may include better precision in targeting, minimizing collateral damage and reduced risk to combatants and civilians. We believe that these dimensions of LAWS should be furthered explored.

In conclusion, Israel looks forward to next year’s GGE, based on the extension of the current mandate up to the 2021 review conference, and hopes that further discussions on this issue will be conducted with a realistic perspective.

I thank you, Mr. Chair.