



PAKISTAN

PERMANENT MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

56 Rue de Moillebeau, 1211 Geneva.

Tel: (41-22) 749 1930 Fax : (41-22) 734 8085

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STATEMENT BY

**Irfan Mahmood Bokhari
Second Secretary**

AT

The informal meeting of experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).

**Geneva,
13 April 2015**

**Statement by Pakistan at the informal meeting of experts on
Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) in the framework
of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW),
13 April 2015.**

Mr Chairperson,

We congratulate you on assuming the role of Chairperson of the informal meeting of experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems or LAWS. We have carefully studied the Chair's food-for-thought-paper and consider it important for holding discussions on this issue. I assure you of our full support and cooperation in reaching substantive conclusions in this meeting.

The structure of the meeting is well suited for in-depth deliberations on the various aspects of lethal autonomous weapon systems. We thank you and the Secretariat for organizing the meeting in this format and look forward to an interactive and substantive discussion. Pakistan has submitted its Working Paper on LAWS, containing its detailed views.

Mr. Chairperson,

Pakistan's position on lethal autonomous weapons systems or LAWS is consistent, clear and unambiguous. We firmly believe that these weapons can fundamentally change the very nature of war, as we know it. In the absence of any human intervention, as is implied by the term 'autonomous', such weapons are rightly being described as the next revolution in military affairs, similar to the introduction of gun-powder and nuclear weapons.

LAWS are by nature unethical – taking the human out of the loop and delegating power to machines, which inherently lack any compassion, feelings and intuition, to make life and death decisions. LAWS would not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants; they lack morality, mortality and judgement. The use of LAWS will make war even more inhumane.

The question of definitional clarity for the word, 'autonomous' is pertinent and requires immediate attention. Whilst automated weapons

and automatic weapons have to some degree a ‘human in the loop’, autonomous implies no scope for such ‘interference’ by any human, calling into question the principles of IHL: distinction, proportionality, precaution, humanity and military necessity. The standards of International Human Rights Law are even more stringent. These rules can be complex and entail subjective decision making requiring human judgment.

The question is simple: Should a machine programmed on a complex set of algorithms, which is devoid of the notions of morality and humanity, be allowed to decide who should live and who should die? We are convinced that the answer is a firm NO.

Mr. Chairperson,

Faced with no loss or injury to their “human” combatants, the States employing LAWS would resort to use of force on a frequent basis – thus undermining the very basis of the restraints on the use of force that international law seeks to maintain. LAWS will lower the threshold of going to war, resulting in armed conflict no longer being a measure of last resort, but a recurrent “low-cost” affair instead.

The introduction of LAWS would affect progress on disarmament and non-proliferation. Faced with the prospect of being overwhelmed by LAWS, states possessing WMD capabilities would be reluctant to give them up, while others would feel encouraged to acquire them. LAWS would, therefore, further undermine international peace and security.

LAWS could easily be used in anonymous and clandestine operations as well as for targeted killings, including in the territory of other states as is being witnessed in the use of armed drones. Like drones, civilians could be targeted and killed with LAWS through so-called signature strikes. The breaches of State sovereignty – in addition to breaches of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law – associated with targeted killing programmes risk making the world less secure, with LAWS in the equation.

LAWS create an accountability and transparency vacuum and provide impunity to the user due to the inability to attribute responsibility for the

harm that they cause. If the nature of a weapon renders responsibility for its consequences impossible, its use should be considered unethical and unlawful. Also, in the event of a security breach or a compromised system, who would be held responsible; the programmer, the hardware manufacturer, the commander who deploys the system or the user state?

Mr. Chairperson,

The use of LAWS in the battlefield would amount to a situation of one-sided killing. Besides depriving the combatants of the targeted state, the protection offered to them by the international law of armed conflict, LAWS would also risk the lives of civilians and non-combatants on both sides.

It remains unclear as to how “combatants” will be defined in case of LAWS. Will targets be chosen based on an algorithm that recognizes certain physical characteristics, for example, “beards and turbans”? Also, there are questions of the protection of those who are not; or no longer, taking part in fighting: “hors de combat”. How will LAWS distinguish between non-combatants from combatants or hors de combat? Can a machine be trusted to have the same or better discerning abilities as a human? These questions remain unanswered.

The unavailability of a legitimate human target of the LAWS user-state on the ground could lead to reprisals on its civilians including through terrorism as is being witnessed in retaliation to drone strikes. The use of LAWS would in-fact prove counter-productive for the deploying state as it could result in augmented asymmetrical warfare.

The states that are currently developing and using LAWS can rest assured that such capabilities will proliferate over time and hence they too shall become vulnerable. States must also be wary of the implications of the replication of LAWS by non-state actors. Going by past experience we all know that monopolies over such technologies are not sustainable. Since the developing countries will not sacrifice their own security at the altar of non-proliferation, an unrestrained robotic arms race could ensue.

Like any other complex machine, LAWS can never be fully predictable or reliable. They could fail for a wide variety of reasons including human error, malfunctions, degraded communications, software failures, cyber attacks, jamming and spoofing, etc. There will always be a level of uncertainty about the way an autonomous weapon system will interact with the external environment.

Mr. Chairperson,

We should not let the blind quest for the ultimate weapon, driven by commercial interests of the military-industrial complex, get the better of us. The introduction of LAWS would be illegal, unethical, inhumane and unaccountable as well as destabilizing for international peace and security with grave consequences. Therefore, their further development and use must be pre-emptively banned through a dedicated Protocol of the CCW. Pending the negotiations and conclusions of a legally binding Protocol, the states currently developing such weapons should place an immediate moratorium on their production and use.

These are the preliminary remarks of my delegation. We look forward to further discussions during the various sessions.

I thank you, Mr. Chairperson
