STATEMENT BY

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PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE

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Mr President,

My delegation is pleased to see you in the Chair and we commend you for arranging this important meeting. We 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.

Mr. President,

We fully agree with the views and points offered by the Acting Director-General of UNOG, Mr. Michael Moller. Lethal autonomous weapon systems, or LAWS, are rightly being described as the next revolution in military affairs, at par with the introduction of gun powder and nuclear weapons. In the absence of any human intervention, such weapons in fact fundamentally change the nature of war.

LAWS are by nature unethical, because there is no longer a human in the loop and the power to make life and death decisions are delegated to machines which inherently lack compassion, morality and intuition. This will likely make war inhumane.

LAWS cannot be programmed to comply with International Humanitarian Law (IHL), in particular its cardinal rules of distinction, proportionality, and precaution. These rules can be complex and entail substantive decision making requiring human judgment.

LAWS will lower the threshold of going to war resulting in armed conflict no longer being a measure of last resort. Consequently, the resort to the use of force in war may become a more frequent phenomenon.

LAWS would, therefore, undermine international peace and security. Their introduction 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.

Mr. President,

LAWS create an accountability 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.

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 and the protection of life less secure with LAWS in the equation.

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.

The absence of a legitimate human target of the LAWS user State would not necessarily prevent human losses on the ground as it could lead to reprisals on its civilians including through terrorism as is being done in retaliation to drone strikes.

The states that are currently developing and using LAWS cannot afford to be complacent that such capabilities will not proliferate over time and hence they too shall become vulnerable. Going by past experience we all know that monopolies over such technologies do not last forever. Since the developing countries are not going to carry the burden of non-proliferation, an unchecked robotic arms race could ensue. Besides, LAWS could also proliferate to non-state actors with disastrous consequences.
Like any other complex machine, LAWS can never be fully predictable or reliable. They could fail for a variety of reasons including human error, technical malfunctions, degraded communications, software failures, cyber attacks, jamming, spoofing, etc. There will always be a level of uncertainty about the way an autonomous weapon system will interact with the external environment.

Mr. President,

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 would make further contributions during the various panel discussions.

I thank you.