

**Lethal autonomous weapons systems - LAWS;
Informal Meeting of Experts,
Geneva, April 11 to 15, 2016;**

Statement of AUSTRIA

Mr Chair,

first of all Austria wishes to congratulate you for presiding over this important meeting. We highly appreciate the outstanding efforts you and your team have invested in preparing and organising this week's deliberations. I assure you of the full support of the Austrian delegation in your endeavours to lead this meeting to a successful outcome.

How necessary and timely it is for us to reconvene after a year for the third time in this format, is shown by the dynamic way in which the international debate about lethal autonomous weapons systems has evolved since the last expert meeting. We all read the unprecedented open letter signed last Summer by more than one thousand of the world's leading specialists in the area of artificial intelligence, as well as in other relevant disciplines, in which the authors warn against the dangers of a proliferation of LAWS, and put on record their disapproval of their research being used for the development of tools to kill people. More recently, the UN Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteurs on the freedom of assembly, Maina Kiai, and on extrajudicial executions, Christof Heyns, have jointly called for the preservation of meaningful human control over autonomous weapons systems. Let me also mention the working paper recently submitted by Switzerland for this meeting, providing valuable input for the discussion on definitions and on the international humanitarian law aspect, and sketching elements for what the authors term a compliance based approach towards LAWS. Austria appreciates these contributions to the discussion, as well as many others that have been made since our last expert meeting.

Mr Chair,

following the evolvement of the international discussion carefully, Austria continues to hold the view that the strive for the development of LAWS brings with it the risk of accelerating the arms race. Furthermore, the principles of international humanitarian law imply the need of human control over the use of armed force, which is also reflected in the concept of "meaningful human control" currently discussed in the context of LAWS. We have noted experts' assessments that in terms of technical feasibility, LAWS are a matter of the near rather than a more distant future. We therefore sense the urgency for the international community to find a common response to the political, legal and other challenges associated with the issue soon.

Mr Chair,

The two preceding Geneva expert meetings on LAWS were important in a number of ways. They helped create international attention for the issue, including in my own government; they provided a forum for the presentation and discussion of expert knowledge, and they offered an opportunity for political dialogue among governments with the participation of civil society, whose valuable input to the discussion I would like to emphasise here. All of this needs to be continued and there is no doubt that under your able guidance this third expert meeting will achieve all of this.

At the same time, the importance and the urgency of the issue requires us to raise the bar. Austria joins those who propose that this meeting should agree, in line with its mandate, to recommend to the forthcoming Fifth Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to establish a group of governmental experts on LAWS. The conference therefore could carry our discussion to a higher level, by tasking that group to identify where States' views converge, but also where differences of views remain, and to derive recommendations from the resulting picture.

Mr Chair,

We are keenly aware that technology is moving fast, outpacing diplomatic deliberations. Let me therefore repeat Austria's call on States from last year's meeting. In order not to create undesirable *faits accomplis*, States should decide immediately to refrain from, or suspend, activities which risk to prejudge the outcome of the international political discussion on LAWS.

Thank you Mr Chair.