

CCW Meeting of Experts on “LAWS”, 17 April 2015

Closing statement by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

The ICRC very much welcomes broad agreement of the need for continued discussions on autonomous weapon systems at the CCW next year.

We remain of the view that incrementally increasing autonomy in weapons systems – specifically in the critical functions of identifying, selecting, and attacking targets – raises fundamental questions about human control over the use of force.

In our view, future discussions at the CCW should address: whether these developments may affect the ability of parties to armed conflicts to respect international humanitarian law; and whether these developments are acceptable under the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience.

Discussions this week have highlighted, once again, broad agreement on the need to retain human control over the critical functions of weapon systems.

To move forward, there is now a need for States to address where the limits should lie, in order to ensure that meaningful, adequate and effective human control is maintained over weapon systems. The work of the CCW in the next year should focus on this objective.

Mr. Chairman,

The ICRC welcomes the wide recognition by States that legal reviews at the domestic level of autonomous weapon systems, as with any new weapon, are required under Article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions or under customary international humanitarian law. We wish to recall that this recognition is not new to States party to the CCW. Indeed, past Review Conferences have recalled the importance of legal reviews of new weapons in connection with the CCW's work.

We encourage States to share their experience and outcomes of legal reviews of existing weapons with autonomy in their critical functions. In this respect, we also welcome proposals on sharing good practices for legal review mechanisms in order to improve implementation of the said legal obligations.

However, as we have stated previously, these efforts to encourage implementation of national legal reviews are not a substitute for States party to the CCW to consider possible policy and other options at the international level to address the legal and ethical limits to autonomy in weapon systems. Rather these two approaches are very much complimentary.