

USA

**The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Informal Meeting
of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems**

U.S. Delegation Opening Statement (Check against delivery)

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Mr. Coordinator,

The United States looks forward to continuing our discussions of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). We appreciate your efforts to focus our work this week on key issues that will continue helping us to understand better the complex issues related to LAWS and to identify recommendations for possible future work.

During our discussions over the past two sessions, the United States has acknowledged that the issues surrounding lethal autonomous weapon systems are complex; we can see that others appreciate that fact as well. Despite the complexity of the issues and the relatively brief amount of time that we have to discuss them, the United States believes that we are making progress. We sense that there is a much better understanding of the complex issues raised by weapon systems that use autonomy. Mr. Coordinator, I wish to assure you of our delegation's full support; we are prepared to continue to contribute to the robust discussions about these issues so that our collective understanding can grow further.

For our part, the United States has explained our national process, applicable to all weapon systems, which is designed to ensure weapons operate legally, safely, and reliably, and are understood by their human operators. In addition, the United States has established, through Department of Defense Directive 3000.09, *Autonomy in Weapons Systems*, a process as to how the United States would consider proposals to develop lethal autonomous weapon systems. As we have noted before, the Directive does not establish a U.S. position on the potential future development of LAWS – it neither encourages nor prohibits the development of future systems. Rather, the Directive sets out additional requirements beyond what is normally required during our weapons acquisition process that would be applicable to weapon systems that have certain autonomous functions. During this week, we would welcome more States coming forward with their national views and policies about the appropriateness of using of technology to improve the performance of weapon systems. In this way, our discussions could significantly

develop and mature. We also continue to welcome contributions from civil society and technical experts to inform our discussion.

We appreciate that you have provided ample time in the schedule to work toward establishing a common understanding of LAWS. There remain divergent views in the CCW on what weapon systems we are trying to discuss and with identifying the relevant challenges associated with the potential use of such weapon systems. For the United States, we want to be clear that we are here to talk about future weapons, or in the words of our mandate, "emerging technologies." Remotely piloted aircraft, homing munitions (such as torpedoes), or other existing weapons, including systems that operate in cyberspace and/or operate as defensive systems (such as Patriot/AEGIS), are not "lethal autonomous weapons." In the course of our discussions on LAWS, views on what would constitute LAWS have varied greatly. For example, we have heard some view LAWS as seemingly synonymous with artificial intelligence, in the sense that they contemplate machines that possess cognitive architectures capable of self-learning. Others' views on what would constitute LAWS are so broad that they would include existing and more rudimentary computer-enabled weapons, which as we have noted, are not the subject of these discussions. Although the United States does not believe that a definition of LAWS is required at this stage of our work, we believe a clearer common understanding of the scope of what we mean by LAWS will help improve the quality of our discussions.

The U.S. Delegation also looks forward to a more in depth discussions with respect to human-machine interaction and about the phrase "meaningful human control." Turning first to the phrase "meaningful human control," we have heard many delegations and experts note that the term is subjective and thus difficult to understand. We have expressed these same concerns about whether "meaningful human control" is a helpful way to advance our discussions.

We view the optimization of the human/machine relationship as a primary technical challenge to developing lethal autonomous weapon systems and a key point that needs to be reviewed from the start of any weapon system development. Because this human/machine relationship extends throughout the development and employment of a system and is not limited to the moment of a decision to engage a target, we consider it more useful to talk about "appropriate levels of human judgment." The United States delegation intends to provide further clarification of our thoughts on this subject during the appropriate session.

Finally, we have consistently heard in the CCW interest expressed on the weapons review process and about the requirement to conduct a legal review of all

new weapon systems, including LAWS. We believe that this is an area on which we should focus as an interim step as we continue our consideration of LAWS in CCW. The United States would like to see the Fifth Review Conference agree to begin work, as part of the overall mandate on LAWS, on a non-legally binding outcome document that describes a comprehensive weapons review process, including the policy, technical, legal, and operational best practices that States could consider using if they decide to develop LAWS or any other weapon system that uses advanced technology.

To be clear, the United States believes that the existence of such a document would not endorse the development of LAWS; it would assist a State in conducting a thorough weapons review if that State is considering developing LAWS or any new weapon system. It would also help ensure consistency and quality in the weapons review process by all States, regardless of the particular weapon being reviewed. It is also an opportunity for the CCW to take a concrete step related to LAWS in the near term, even while we continue to develop our common understanding of what constitutes LAWS.

The United States remains very supportive of discussing LAWS in the CCW. Like we said earlier, we think we are making good, incremental progress, but it is important to continue increasing our understanding about LAWS rather than trying to decide possible outcomes. We believe that LAWS is a complex subject that requires in-depth, substantive discussions. Our expectation is that this week's discussion will lead to a better understanding of the various issues related to LAWS and that will help to identify recommendations for possible future work.