



Foreign &
Commonwealth
Office

**UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

Statement for Discussion on the possible options for addressing the humanitarian and international security challenges posed by emerging technology in the area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

At the Meeting of the Group of Government Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, Friday 12 April 2018

Mr Chairman,

1. We view this GGE is conducting essential work and are pleased with the discussion and progress made this week. I would like to discuss further points on International Humanitarian Law (IHL), Article 36 legal weapons reviews and the way ahead.
2. Firstly, I am pleased by the many references to the centrality of existing IHL to this discussion. To discuss LAWS is to discuss means and methods of warfare. As such, IHL provides the appropriate paradigm for this discussion. The UK's clear position is that IHL and Article 36 Weapons Reviews are the applicable legal framework for the assessment and use of all weapons systems in armed conflict, including new and novel weapons technologies, in order to ensure their effects are thoroughly assessed and understood.
3. The UK has published its weapons review procedures online. The UK welcomes engagement and comments on its process. To this end, the UK has hosted two International Weapon Review Fora to discuss how lawyers charged with Article 36 reviews might discharge their responsibilities, including in the context of highly automated or autonomous technologies. These Fora were attended by a broad mix of states, academics from science and law, interested NGOs and by the ICRC. Another

forum is planned for 2019.

4. The UK is aware that despite the large numbers of States being signatories to the first Protocol, not all formally conduct legal weapons reviews. Conversely there are States that are not signatories to the Protocol which conduct Article 36-type legal weapons reviews. We hope that sharing our approach may encourage other states to publish theirs, or at least begin implementing such protocols if they do not do so already.

Mr Chairman,

5. The potential impact of any future LAWS require that the issue is dealt with accurately and sustainably. We do not support the call by some for our discussion to move next year to negotiation on a legally binding instrument or moratorium on LAWS.
6. At this point, the GGE is still considering the fundamental questions of what characterises a LAWS and whether they exist. There is more common understanding to be reached and hence, the debate is far from mature enough to consider legal options. We consider the charts and frameworks introduced this week to be valuable aids, for example the framework on Human-Machine interaction indicates the many stages at which human control touchpoints can be active throughout the lifecycle of a weapon. This merits further consideration. We should move in incremental steps to build our common understanding, ensuring that any measures considered are actually appropriate to the complexity of the subject - and don't prejudice legitimate research and development. And we believe our discussions this week, including the panel session, have been rich and are indeed making valuable progress. As many other delegations have acknowledged this week, areas of consensus are emerging. We thank the many states who have come well prepared and the ICRC and civil society for their engagement.
7. Whilst deepening our understanding, we should continue to make progress. We encourage the universalisation and enhancement of Article 36 legal weapons reviews and greater compliance with IHL. IHL is a more agile metric for assessing all emerging lethal capabilities on a case-by-case basis than the pre-emptive instrument of a ban. Trying to impose a legal prohibition without understanding what is being regulated will lead to such an instrument becoming redundant, requiring revision, and risks causing unintended consequences on civilian developments. Such an approach risks undermining the integrity and utility of existing review processes and setting a poor precedent for bespoke legislation of other capabilities.
8. When thinking about the way ahead, the UK is always willing to work with any interested states to share best practice - including on how better to incorporate AI and autonomy-specific considerations into our Article 36 legal weapons reviews in a way that reflects emerging technology. The UK would also be open to considering the establishment of a technical group of experts to keep emerging technologies under constant review under the auspices of the GGE discussions on LAWS in the CCW. The panel discussion

yesterday showed the relevance and importance of reflection and analysis.

9. In closing, we should recall that there is already a robust ethical standpoint of accountability, proportionality, discrimination and necessity. These 'hard' criteria track adherence to ethical guidelines. They demonstrate that the society is proving itself adept at dealing with these emerging issues. IHL has successfully accommodated previous evolutions in military technology such as the aeroplane and submarine. The same would apply to fully autonomous systems should they ever exist.
10. Mr Chairman, thank you for the valuable discussions, which you have expertly chaired this week. We offer you our full support for continued discussion on these key topics in August.