Thank you, Mr. President.

At the outset we wish to thank the distinguished Ambassador Simon-Michel for leading the successful Informal expert meeting, which took place last May and had a diverse and rich agenda. The CCW is an IHL-focused framework, which provides the appropriate forum to discuss the various aspects of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) and their possible use during an armed conflict. There is no doubt that having a thorough discussion on means that do not yet exist, is a challenging task which requires an open mind and long-term vision, but at the same time, in order to have a serious discussion, requires us to be realistic and steer away from associations that originate from popular culture and science fiction movies.

Mr. President,

In our view, a legal discussion on LAWS should be guided by two vital principles.

The first principle is maintaining an open mind regarding the positive capabilities of future LAWS. It is difficult to foresee today how these capabilities may look like in ten, twenty or fifty years from now. As a consequence, we believe that any responsible legal discussion of this issue, should be undertaken in a prudent and unpretentious fashion. It would be factually unfounded to argue today that autonomous systems could never reach certain positive capabilities, which would enable their use in accordance with IHL. Operating under this assumption has direct influence on any legal discussion on the matter.

The second principle is to acknowledge the complexities and nuances of such discussion. Future LAWS could take on a variety of forms, have a
wide array of capabilities, and may be intended to operate in simple operational environments or more complicated operational environments. Consequently, a serious legal discussion on them cannot be summed up in sweeping, non-nuanced, clear-cut statements. To claim that LAWS will never, or will always, comply with the Laws of Armed Conflict, would be just too simplistic an approach. Each particular Lethal Autonomous Weapon System proposed, should be assessed on a case to case basis, bearing in mind its specific capabilities, along with the specific scenarios of use for which it is intended.

With these two principles in mind, we observe that the legal employment of a specific weapon system ought to depend on whether it can function within the scenarios of use for which it is intended, without violating the basic principles of the Laws of Armed Conflict, including the rules of proportionality, distinction and precaution. If the specific system under consideration is capable of operating in such a manner, its use should be considered legal, and the evaluation of its capability to do so should be assessed in each particular case.

In order to ensure the legal use of a lethal autonomous weapon system, the characteristics and capabilities of each system must be adapted to the complexity of its intended environment of use. Where deemed necessary, the warfare environment could be simplified for the system by, for example, limiting the system's operation to a specific territory, during a limited timeframe, against specific types of targets, to conduct specific kinds of tasks, or other such limitations which are all set by a human, or, for example, if necessary, it could be programmed to refrain from action, or require and wait for input from human decision-makers when the legality of a specific action is unclear. Indeed, human judgment exists all throughout the various phases of development, testing, review, approval, and decision to employ a weapon system, including an autonomous one. The end goal would be for the system's capabilities to be adapted to the
operational complexities that it is expected to encounter, in a manner ensuring compliance with the Laws of Armed Conflict. In this regard, LAWS are not different from many other weapon systems which do exist today, including weapons whose legal use is already regulated under the CCW.

Mr. President,

In our view, there is even a good reason to believe that LAWS might ensure better compliance with the Laws of Armed Conflict in comparison to human soldiers. In many ways, LAWS could be more predictable than humans on the battlefield. Experience shows that whenever sophisticated and precise weapons have been employed on the battlefield, they have led to increased protection of both civilians and military forces. Thus, Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems may serve to uphold in an improved manner, the ideals of both military necessity and humanitarian concern – the two pillars upon which the Laws of Armed Conflict rest.

Mr. President,

As mentioned earlier today, Israel welcomes the important work on LAWS undertaken earlier this year by the informal meeting of experts. As many other delegations, we also believe that the issue of LAWS merits further study under the CCW framework during 2015, in order to explore more thoroughly the various aspects relating to this issue.

Thank you, Mr. President.