Mr. Chairman,

Technology is advancing rapidly, quicker than the legal and regulatory systems that are usually based on social consensus. And these regulatory systems are not always able to fill in these gaps quickly. But we can prevent that Killer robots become part of such gaps and we should.

If killing a human being is already disturbing and problematic when it is done by another human being, how is it going to be if both the decision and action come from a machine? This is a key question and it has already been posed many times: Is it morally acceptable to delegate decisions about the use of lethal force to autonomous systems?

Last year, my organization PAX initiated an inter faith declaration calling for a ban on development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons. As of today, this statement joins the voices of more than 100 faith leaders of various religious denominations from over 35 countries. The statement can be found in the back of the room.

For PAX this issue is first and foremost an ethical one, it is about human dignity. Killer robots are another step in what we see as a dehumanizing trend in warfare. Current developments are sometimes presented as a normal evolution in the technologization of war. But nothing is inevitable, if we act in time, we should and must be able to keep human beings in control over the decision to kill.

It is remarkable to see how many states over the last two years devoted time and thinking into the issue. The 4 day meeting in May last year, excellently chaired by French ambassador Simon Michel, was enriched by the depth and breadth of states’ interventions. It is our sincere hope that this week we will see lively debates again and moreover we hope we will see a growing consensus on issues of concern. A consensus that will move us towards action, action towards national policies, towards a group of governmental experts and in the end in an international negotiating mandate.

The question is how much time do we have before – like with most disarmament work – we are too late, the genie is out of the bottle and facts on the ground are created that will be too hard to reverse? This is by no means a simple issue and no simple answers are expected. But with technology moving so quickly, it is important to recognize that although we cannot predict future technology – we can appropriately address trends and developments.

As with any disarmament process, exact definitions and consensus on details come at the last phase. So for states to have a result orientated approach, to start to develop national policies, to work on practical measures or to work towards consensus on the need for a prohibition, it is at this stage perhaps not yet needed to have exact definitions on lethal autonomous weapons systems. And for states to acknowledge this week that meaningful human control is essential and a good starting point for further debate, it is perhaps not needed to have detailed criteria on MHC yet. Besides, when has there ever been a disarmament process where the definition of a weapon system was straight forward from the beginning?

Last, it is also important to acknowledge that ethical aspects in this process are not limited to the questions regarding the autonomous weapons themselves. Taking action or failing to take action around the development, production and use of LAWs also has ethical implications.

PAX believes the coming 5 days are an important step towards stopping full automation of warfare that will go against the principles of human dignity. Not only the dignity and right to life of those who will be directly affected, but also the dignity of soldiers and civilians in whose name killer robots will be deployed.

Thank you, Miriam Struyk, PAX