UNUNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND

STATEMENT
to the
Informal Meeting of Experts
on
Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

11 - 15 April 2016

Please check against delivery
General Debate

Mr Chair,

- Firstly thank you for all of your excellent preparation for this meeting. The programme is comprehensive, covering the key aspects from definitions of key concepts and mapping autonomy, to the legal, moral, ethical and security considerations that require further discussion.

- The UK is of the view that these discussions are relevant and timely. We also believe that the CCW is the right forum for this discussion.

- The UK wishes to reiterate its policy on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). The UK believes that LAWS do not, and may never, exist. Furthermore, we have no intention of ever developing systems that could operate without any human control. The UK is committed to ensuring its weapons remain under human control. We do not believe that a pre-emptive ban on LAWS is necessary for two reasons:

  Firstly, existing international humanitarian law is sufficient to assess whether any future weapon system, including LAWS, would be capable of legal use.

  And secondly, we believe strongly that there could be legitimate non-lethal advantages to increasingly autonomous technology in the future, for example, in the field of logistics. To legislate now, without a clear understanding of the potential opportunities as well as dangers of a technology that we cannot fully appreciate, would risk leading to the use of generalised and unclear language which would be counter-productive. Instead, we should, for now, allow research and development in this area to continue uninhibited.

- But this does not mean that the UK is not willing to engage in discussions to define understanding of what we mean by LAWS, what the related concerns are, and how they might be addressed in the future.

  We encourage other States to share their national policy and approach on LAWS.

- Over the coming days, the UK hopes that we make progress in some of the following areas:

  - Firstly, in considering the importance and relevance of existing international humanitarian law. From our perspective, to discuss LAWS is to discuss means and methods of warfare. As such, international humanitarian law provides the appropriate paradigm for this discussion. To that end, we look forward to sharing our views and hearing about other states' experiences on the process of Legal Weapons Review - a process which has been developed exactly for circumstances such as where the legality of new and novel weapons technologies needs to be thoroughly assessed and understood.
• Secondly, we hope that the session on mapping will provide us with a realistic overview of the current state of the art in robotics and artificial intelligence. It is important that our discussions are grounded in a realistic assessment of the limits and, perhaps more importantly, the legitimate possibilities and applications of technology.

• Thirdly, the discussion on the characteristics of LAWS will be an important one. Within this debate it is important to remember that the CCW has been tasked with considering *emerging* technologies. To that end, we should exchange views about what is and what is not an autonomous weapons system, a subject where clear, careful definitions and common understandings of their meaning and application will be critical.

• Fourthly, we are looking forward to hearing further consideration of the wider potential implications of LAWS. The CCW remains the right forum to bring together the most relevant expertise to address this issue.

• With regard to the recommendations that we might put forward at the end of the week, the UK would like to see agreement that future discussions should work towards:

  • Agreeing the relevance and importance of existing international humanitarian law to this debate.

  • Reaffirming key principles of IHL and commitment to increase compliance with those principles, including the importance of Legal Weapons Reviews.

  • Commitment to agreeing a working definition of LAWS consistent with the mandate of the discussion.

• Mr Chair, we look forward to five days of fruitful discussions under your leadership. Thank you.