Netherlands Intervention
3rd Informal meeting of experts on LAWS
Geneva, 11-15 April 2016

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

First of all, I would like to thank the panel of experts for their excellent presentations. I am certain that these will help us during our further discussion.
As already mentioned yesterday, the Netherlands, as many other States, thinks that it is essential to agree upon working definitions, as this would help to clarify and structure our discussion.

In that respect we think it is essential to differentiate between Autonomous Weapon Systems (AWS) and FULLY autonomous weapon systems.

We propose the following working definition for an autonomous weapon systems:
An autonomous weapon is a weapon that, without human intervention, selects and engages targets matching certain predefined criteria, following a human decision to deploy the weapon on the understanding that an attack, once launched, CANNOT BE STOPPED by human intervention.

However, humans do exercise control over these weapons in the wider loop of the targeting cycle. Although humans can no longer intervene once the weapon has been deployed, they do play a prominent role in programming the characteristics of the targets that are to be engaged and in the decision to deploy the weapon. And afterwards the outcome and effects are assessed by humans, like the proportionality of possible collateral damage. These kinds of weapons do already exists.

That is not the case for fully autonomous weapon systems, in which humans do not exercise any meaningful control at all. Those weapons make autonomous decisions on the basis of self-learned or self-made rules and selects and engages targets without any human involvement. Those weapons do not exist.

The advantage of dividing between these two categories is that it allows states to use the concept of meaningful human control to decide about which weapon systems are in principle acceptable and which are not. A wide definition of autonomous weapon systems would also contribute to a better
understanding of meaningful human control as also existing autonomous weapon systems fall into this category. The goal is NOT to prohibit autonomous weapons systems, or to further regulate them, but to increase our understanding of the level of human control or human judgment is required. That insight will help to better formulate how much and what kind of increase of autonomy is acceptable before having AWS that to NOT possess sufficient levels of human control, which we would call fully autonomous weapon systems.

QUESTION: From the presentations we learned that definitions are not or might nog be needed. My question, would it not be helpful to have at least a working definition, to further structure the complex discussions about LAWS?