

Thank you Mr Chair

Please allow me at the outset to congratulate you on your appointment as Chair of this Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW and to thank you for all your efforts, and those of your delegation, in guiding our preparations for it. You have the full support of the New Zealand delegation.

New Zealand welcomes the addition in 2015 of Algeria and the State of Palestine as states parties to the CCW. We recognise the importance of universalisation of the CCW and its Protocols and welcome the report on the promotion of universality presented by the Implementation Support Unit. We urge all states that have yet to do so to join the Convention and its Protocols.

Equally as important as its universalisation is the full implementation of the Convention and its Protocols alongside other standards of IHL for the protection of civilians. In this context, New Zealand was pleased to participate in the useful discussions hosted by Austria in September this year on the harm that civilians face in many conflicts from explosive weapons used in densely populated areas. We must explore ways, as the UN Secretary General has said, to address this issue and to minimise this harm.

New Zealand is also concerned about the complex legal and political challenges posed by the possibility of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS). Given the pace of technological advances, the international community must ensure that international law, particularly international humanitarian law, is complied with when decisions are made around the development and use of new weapon systems, and that command and control arrangements maintain clear legal accountability.

New Zealand has found the two Meetings of Experts on LAWS to be useful and informative, even though in many ways they have raised more questions than they have resolved – a sign, perhaps, of the complex and inter-connected nature of the issues raised by such weapon systems. With a view to the convening next year of the CCW Review Conference we support a strengthened mandate for further work within the CCW on this issue. We do not have strong views on the format that this should take but consider that, whether a Meeting of Experts or an open-ended Group of Governmental Experts, it should have a mandate that moves us forward in a concrete way and facilitates informed decision-making at the Review Conference.

Thank you Mr Chair.