

CANADA'S NATIONAL STATEMENT

Experts meeting on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Geneva – April 11-15, 2016

Mr. President:

Canada would first like to thank, the Chair, Ambassador Biontino of Germany and his team, for their diligence and hard work in advancing the general discussion on LAWS over the last two years. We are grateful for efforts and you may be assured of this delegation's full support.

It is our hope that this third Experts Meeting will bear fruit in bringing the international community one step closer to a common approach, towards a better understanding of the complex and multifaceted issues underpinning LAWS, and cohesively addressing them. The upcoming CCW Review Conference also provides an opportunity to strengthen our collective understanding of this important issue in a timely manner.

While Canada remains concerned about the implications of increasing levels of autonomy in weapons systems, Canada does not believe that banning technology, especially dual-use technology, is likely to be the best approach at this point in addressing the operational, moral/ethical or policy or legal risks that LAWS may pose. Rather, we believe that the most practical and most meaningful way forward is to focus on examining the implications of using different types of autonomous weapons in different contexts.

To this end, Canada is pleased to continue its contribution to this discussion, as illustrated by our submission of two food-for-thought-papers to help spur our collective discussion. These papers delve deeper into key issues which have been central to the conversation to date; the first touches on how levels of autonomy vary according to a variety of factors, including a system's technology and capabilities, operational environment and chosen task. The second underscores how the implication of LAWS varies according to contextual factors, such as operational environment, geo-political context, weapon type, use and target, and the level and nature of the human-machine interaction. Please note that these papers have been developed to contribute to the discussion and should not be construed as support by the Government of Canada for or against such systems.

We encourage High Contracting Parties to read these papers and we welcome feedback and views on their content and approach. It is our hope that they will provide added perspective, and also lead our discussions from the abstract towards the more practical.

Determining what kinds of actions should or should never be ceded to machines; establishing guidelines around operational safeguards; clarifying contextual implications that may impact upon the employment of particular systems; working to promote and implement existing mechanisms for ensuring compliance with international law; and better fleshing out conceptual notions of 'meaningful human control' or appropriate human judgement are but some examples of concrete, pragmatic, robust and useful ways in which we as an international community can continue to grapple with the challenges and opportunities posed by LAWS. Indeed over time, these approaches -

individually and collectively – may help us develop norms of responsible behaviour regarding the development, testing, deployment and use of weapons systems with significant levels of autonomy. Charting the way forward on these issues would seem to be a natural task for a future CCW Group of Governmental Experts.

Additionally, with respect to a possible GGE and the CCW Review Conference, Canada is also supportive of last year's proposal to further examine how transparency and confidence-building measures could contribute to helping the international community address the implications of LAWS. For example, increased transparency and information-sharing around guidelines and best practices for weapons reviews could play an important role in assisting States fulfill their Article 36 obligations with regards to LAWS.

On this point, Canada continues to believe that International Humanitarian Law is sufficiently robust to regulate emerging technologies. That said, we also recognize that LAWS may raise unique challenges with regards to the weapons review process, such as challenges related to testing and evaluation. There may also be unique challenges to ensuring the lawful use of LAWS generally, and in light of the significant impact a host of contextual factors could have upon their potential use. Such complexities could rightfully be the subject of further international discussion. To this end, the Swiss Working Paper provides some interesting proposals which merit further reflection and thought.

Regarding transparency and confidence-building measures, we believe that they could play a role in helping to address, amongst other things, concerns related to geo-political stability, and could include sharing information on a spectrum of activities such as testing & evaluation; approval authority; and even doctrine. We believe there is value in seeking to develop concrete proposals in this regard that could then be considered at the RevCon or in subsequent discussions.

In closing, let me say that Canada remains acutely aware of the importance of making progress in this body, and the need to balance the legitimate security interests of States with the humanitarian imperative to work collaboratively to limit the potentially harmful effects of emerging technologies in situations of armed conflict. We look forward to working closely with you and all High Contracting Parties in pursuit of this shared objective.

Thank you / Merci