



The informal meeting of experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) :13 - 17 April 2015

Statement by Sri Lanka

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation is pleased to join this discussion on the Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS), which will build on the deliberations of the 1st informal meeting that the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) had in May last year. We wish to commend the hard work by you as well as the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) of the CCW, in preparing for this meeting in a structured manner, and please be assured of our support to you and constructive participation in the coming days.

To achieve a meaningful outcome from our discussion on the subject of emerging technologies in the area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS), it is imperative to have an inclusive dialogue, within the framework and mandate of CCW, which has the capacity and necessary expertise, given its multi-stakeholder participation. In this context, we commend the ongoing efforts for awareness raising on this issue of emerging technology and its implications to humanity.

We note that there are still many areas that need to be fully analyzed, debated and understood, including principles and concepts involved, implications, and the types of action required. However, the negative consequences of possible use of LAWS in the realm of warfare and for civilian populations have been highlighted adequately, and it is these considerations which have helped to bring the issue of LAWS into the agenda of the CCW. We are convinced that the past success achieved through prohibiting blinding laser weapons by adopting Protocol IV, remains a stark pointer to effectively addressing this challenge.

Mr. Chairman,

Sri Lanka believes that due consideration should be given, when seeking to regulate a dual use technology such as robotic technology or taking any other form of pre-emptive action, to ensuring its potential benefits in peaceful use, such as in rescue operations, intelligence, mine clearance, logistical operations, and other areas like in agriculture, or health. Sri Lanka is of the view that there needs to be maximum clarity among Parties on several key areas, when the potential use of LAWS is sought even in the limited circumstances that might be identified for the purpose.

These areas range from the level of autonomy and under what context it is used, as well as the potential risks that are associated, how best to ensure an accountability mechanism and compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and other laws, and finally the ethical and sociological obligations.

Mr. Chairman,

We are particularly concerned of the possible impact of use of LAWS on international peace and security. Such autonomous systems have the potential to escalate the pace of warfare and undermine the existing arms controls and regulations, to aggravate the dangers of asymmetric warfare, and destabilize regional and global security.

Possession of autonomous weapons by some States, combined with their possible asymmetric usages in war, may compel other States also to abandon their policies of restraint or moratorium and ignite an arms race. Moreover, the gap between the "developing" and "developed" worlds will be exacerbated by the latter's more ready access to LAWS heightening the asymmetry in warfare that already exists after the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) in the 1980s when ICT applications to modern warfare began. Our experience in nuclear weapons provides a useful lesson for all of us to understand the consequences of such an arm race, where even today possession itself has continued to remain a threat to regional as well as global security.

Furthermore, combined with the notion that the use of LAWS would reduce military casualties significantly, any proliferation of fully autonomous weapons could be catalytic in resorting to armed attacks and war, which is of serious concern to global peace and security.

Today we witness more destructive actions by terrorist entities through access to technological advancements, especially related to cyber space. In this background, the possibility of having access to LAWS by non - state actors or terrorist entities or their ability to attack any of the pre-programmed autonomous weapon systems, and to alter the commands or targets, could gravely endanger the security of all people, regardless of its initial intended military use.

Mr. Chairman,

We agree that the use of LAWS could open up new challenges on compliance with IHL principles such as distinction, proportionality, precaution and military necessity. Left unanswered this will also lead to a crucial accountability gap.

Further, on the more social and ethical question of whether we should leave the ultimate decision on right to life of an individual or a group of people, to a machine that operates without human control we are urged to think seriously. As the Convention stipulates "the civilian population and the combatants shall at all times

remain under the protection and authority of the principles of international law derived from established custom, from the principles of humanity and from the dictates of public conscience,” and we therefore need to be wary of allowing any level of autonomy in the use of weapons systems. The implications of LAWS becoming the moral-discerner in its own right, without human control, are far reaching to contend with.

Mr. Chairman,

For the reasons outlined, we encourage the continuation of the deliberations on this issue, to develop common understating on future challenges of use of LAWS and ways and means to overcome them, including the option of pre-emptive ban, for it is believed that prevention is always better than cure.

Finally, Sri Lanka also believes in the need for articulating national debates and national policies on the issue of LAWS, in addition to the international efforts, which have gained momentum through the CCW.

Thank you.