

CCW: 2018 Meeting of High Contracting Parties

New Zealand Statement on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

Thank you Mr Chair.

At the outset please allow me to express my delegation's appreciation to Ambassador Amandeep Gill of India for his efforts in chairing the Group of Governmental Experts on emerging technologies in the area of Lethal autonomous weapons systems, the report of which we are considering today. New Zealand found the GGE to be a valuable exercise – one which highlighted a growing convergence on the necessity of preserving human control over all weapons systems. Of course the GGE also highlighted a range of views on what constitutes human control, as well as a number of ideas on how best to preserve it, and we are under no illusion about the challenges that lie ahead.

Although we are well aware that the final report of the 2018 sessions of the GGE reflects a range of significant compromises, including for my delegation, we welcome that it was able to be agreed by consensus – an outcome that was by no means assured, even at midnight on the final day, but which nevertheless has highlighted a very widespread commitment to move forward. This is important, not least because the rapid pace of technological change – alongside growing public concern about the weaponisation of autonomous technologies – means that failing to make progress is not an option. As the ICRC has concluded in the paper presented to this meeting – *“States must approach this task with some urgency, as technological developments that remove or reduce human control over weapon systems are threatening to outpace international deliberations.”* In other words, standing still would effectively be a step backwards.

It is against this backdrop, Mr Chair, that I wish to place on record New Zealand's strong preference for a more forward-leaning mandate for future meetings of the GGE. As we stated during the August GGE, we would like to see a mandate that facilitates a more targeted focus on the human element (or the human-machine interface), rather than on definitions – which remain elusive – or on technology. In our view, such a focus should enable us to understand more clearly exactly what type and quality of human control is required throughout the life cycle of an autonomous weapon system to ensure

compliance with IHL. We note that our views to this end align with the recommendation put forward by the ICRC in its new paper and we will certainly be looking at the guiding questions the ICRC has proposed in our preparations for meetings of the GGE in 2019.

In addition, New Zealand continues to advocate for the future mandate of the GGE to preserve sufficient space for deliberations – and wherever possible, *decisions* – on the concrete proposals that have been put forward to address the challenges posed by LAWS. As we have stated throughout the GGE process we remain open to all options on the table and do not see them as mutually exclusive. We consider that delegations are ready to commence more detailed analysis of these options, including of how they can reflect agreement on the type and quality of human control over a weapon system that is considered necessary to ensure compliance with IHL.

We hope that the decisions reached at this meeting will reflect this modest ambition and trust that, in any event, delegations will make the most of future sessions of the GGE to achieve meaningful progress on this important issue.

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