

Joint Statement on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems
First Committee, 77th United Nations General Assembly
Thematic Debate – Conventional Weapons

21 October 2022

Mr. Chair,

I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of 70 states:

Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bahamas, Belgium, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Montenegro, Namibia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, State of Palestine, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela, and Austria.

The research and development of new technologies is progressing at a rapid pace. New and emerging technologies hold great promise for the advancement of human welfare and could help to better protect civilians in conflict in certain circumstances.

However, the introduction of new technological applications, such as those related to autonomy in weapon systems, also raise serious concerns from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives. We therefore see an urgent need for the international community to further their understanding and address these risks and challenges by adopting appropriate rules and measures, such as principles, good practices, limitations and constraints.

We are committed to upholding and strengthening compliance with International Law, in particular International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including through maintaining human responsibility and accountability in the use of force.

Important work has been done and continues to be done under the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), including the endorsement in 2019 of the 11 Guiding Principles that, inter alia, should continue to guide the work of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. We are also encouraged that proposals on possible measures and options were presented and discussed at the GGE.

Although it has proven difficult to translate progress made in the CCW's discussions into further concrete outcomes, the consideration of substantive proposals facilitated the development of shared understandings and convergence on key substantive issues. This included, in particular, the approach based on the prohibition of autonomous weapon systems that cannot be used in compliance with IHL, and the regulation of other types of autonomous weapon systems. States may have different understandings of terms like human judgement, control or involvement. However, there is also a recognition, shared by many, that the human element is and must remain central in the use of force.

Against this background, we emphasise the necessity for human beings to exert appropriate control, judgement and involvement in relation to the use of weapons systems in order to ensure any use is in compliance with International Law, in particular International Humanitarian Law, and that humans remain accountable for decisions on the use of force.

Going forward, we recognise the importance of focusing efforts in particular on elaborating the normative and operational framework regulating, where appropriate and necessary, autonomous weapons including through internationally agreed rules and limits.

We also deem it important to further deepen our understanding of these issues. In this regard we welcome the announcement of an international conference to be hosted by The Netherlands on responsible military development, deployment and use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the announcement of a regional conference, to be hosted by Costa Rica, on the social and humanitarian impact of autonomous weapons. We also welcome the work carried out by the Secretary General within the "Our Common Agenda" initiative to develop an Agenda for Peace, which features lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) as one of the core areas. We call on the SG to continue to proactively engage on this important issue, including by urging States to make progress towards an outcome at the GGE.

International organisations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNIDIR, civil society organisations and the tech community make important contributions to international discussions on how to address issues related to emerging technologies and autonomy in weapons systems, including the ethical, human rights, societal and technological dimension. Their participation greatly enhances our ongoing discussions.

We urge High Contracting Parties to the CCW, together with all UN Member States, to intensify consideration of this issue. We are committed to strengthen efforts to address the issue of autonomy in weapon systems.

Thank you.