

GGE LAWS – Segment on characteristics

Statement by Belgium

Mr. President,

Let me first congratulate you on the assumption of the Presidency of this fourth session of the GGE LAWS. We assure you of my delegation's full support in your endeavors towards a successful outcome of our important deliberations.

My country aligns itself with the statement that was/will be delivered by the European Union and wishes to make the following remarks in its national capacity.

Rapid progress in the fields of robotics and artificial intelligence is increasingly raising essential ethical questions, particularly with regard to the potential development, deployment, and use of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS).

Belgium shares the concerns of many in the international community about the risks and dangers posed by such autonomous weapons from an ethical and a humanitarian point of view.

Under no circumstances should we, the international community, allow the development, deployment and use of weapons systems that would be incompatible with International Law, in particular with International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.

We strongly believe that the GGE, which is now in its fourth session, should strive to make tangible progress this year.

This is the reason why Belgium, along with Ireland and Luxembourg, has tabled a food-for-thought paper which aspires to narrow down our discussions, contribute to a shared understanding of the issues at stake, and build as broad a consensus as possible on the preferable way forward.

Specifically, our paper aims to take forward the discussion on the specific characteristics of LAWS that would be incompatible with International Humanitarian Law. Additionally, we propose a link between these characteristics and some policy options by which lethal autonomous weapon systems could be prevented from being introduced.

Mr. President,

In the debate on LAWS, a number of specific characteristics would, in our view, pose serious concerns from a legal, humanitarian and/or ethical point of view when introduced into lethal weapons systems. Each of the following characteristics in its own would be problematic:

- a. The ability to run through a targeting cycle, with the final intention to apply lethal force, without any human intervention;
- b. The ability to switch to lethal mode without any human intervention;
- c. The impossibility to interrupt or deactivate the autonomous mode;
- d. The ability to redefine its mission or objective without any human intervention.

Another crucial area of our discussions concerns the choice of the most appropriate policy response to regulate the development of these new technologies and the best means to prohibit the introduction of weapons systems which possess characteristics which we deem incompatible with our legal, humanitarian and/or ethical standards.

On the domestic front, Belgium has already put in place instruments to rule out the use of weapons that are contrary to International Humanitarian Law.

Our country applies, in particular, Article 36 of the First Additional Protocol to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which imposes the obligation to assess the legality of any new weapon under International Law. We still believe that legal reviews give the best assurances as to a weapon's compatibility with International Law.

Other additional policy options should also be considered, within the framework of the CCW. These can take the form of a strong political declaration and/or a dedicated international legal instrument.

Belgium hopes that this food-for-thought paper will further our quest for the prohibition of weapons systems that contravene our legal, humanitarian and/or ethical standards.

An objective which the international community broadly shares.

I thank you Mr. President.