Mr. President,

First, let me congratulate you for your outstanding conduct of our work so far. You can count on the full support of my delegation for the remainder of our deliberations.

Belgium associates itself with the declaration made by the European Union and would like to stress the following remarks in its national capacity.

The Belgian Government fully shares the concerns on the possible risks and dangers from an ethical and humanitarian point of view related to the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). We are committed to the efforts to avoid the emergence and use of LAWS that would not be compatible with IHL and applicable International Human Rights. Action has to be taken in order to avoid any unwanted scenario, but action has to be based on sound knowledge of the issue and the challenges at hand.

Belgium submitted a working paper on the characterization of LAWS in November 2017 as a contribution to the process of reaching a common understanding of what LAWS actually are. This is a prerequisite for the
international community to take effective measures to successfully tackle the risks related to the application of autonomy to lethal weapon systems.

However, we are conscious of the fact that the ongoing work on definitions and characteristics of LAWS is a complex and long process. Therefore, we are also ready to contribute in parallel to the discussion on “meaningful human control” on LAWS, which we see as a complementary approach to advance the discussions.

Given the challenges posed by the increasing autonomy of lethal weapon systems, my delegation deems it important to make progress towards concrete results. We believe that the most realistic way forward at this stage and in the short term is to pursue the options that are described in the French-German non-paper issued in November 2017, i.e. the drafting of a political declaration, the identification of good practices on the evaluation of the lawfulness of weapon systems, and the elaboration of code of conduct. These short-term options do not, in any case, exclude the adoption of other political or legal options, at a later stage when the debate has matured and the understanding of the LAWS issue become more thorough and shared.

The next step, in our eyes, should thus be the adoption of a political declaration that aims at excluding any introduction of unacceptable autonomous weapon systems based on the following overriding principles:

- The human agent should bear the ultimate responsibility in the choice of the means of war, and thus of any potential use of LAWS. International Humanitarian Law which was developed for human agents remains fully applicable in the framework of LAWS;
- The necessity to exercise sufficient human control on LAWS.

Finally Mr President,

We have a powerful instrument at our disposal to ensure that we do not put into service non IHL compliant weapons. This is Article 36 of the first
additional Protocol to the conventions of Geneva on the evaluation of the lawfulness of all new weapons. Belgium has put this instrument into practice and we remain ready to share our views regarding the best practices on its implementation. We call for the universal adoption and implementation of this rule.

I thank you Mr. President.