The Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

U.S. Delegation Opening Statement
As Delivered by Michael W. Meier
Geneva, November 12, 2015

Thank you, Mr. President. The United States Delegation would like to congratulate you on your assumption as the President of the Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). We are confident that you will guide our work to a successful conclusion, and I want to assure you of the full support of my delegation.

The United States places great value in the CCW as an IHL framework that brings together States with diverse security interests to discuss issues related to weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or that have indiscriminate effects. We believe that CCW provides a unique forum for discussing important issues related to the use of weapons as it has the mix of technical, policy, political and military experts that allows us to strike an appropriate balance between humanitarian concerns and national security equities. We would like to take this opportunity to express our appreciation for the work done in the experts’ meetings over the past year and commend the excellent efforts of the various coordinators of Amended Protocol II and Protocol V. We are pleased with the decisions of the High Contracting Parties to Amended Protocol II and Protocol V that will allow us to move forward with our important work related to IEDs and explosive remnants of war as we prepare for the 2016 Review Conference.

The United States places a special emphasis on the need for universalization of the CCW and its protocols as it is the best way to achieve the humanitarian benefits of this convention. We welcome Grenada’s accession to the CCW and its protocols, which brings us to 121 High Contracting Parties.

The importance of universalization continues to be brought home by recent events around the world. Over this past week and months, we have seen concerning reports that incendiary weapons continue to be used in an indiscriminate manner against civilian populations, as well as reports of increased use of IEDs and landmines in places like Syria, Libya, Ukraine, and Yemen. The
United States shares in the international community’s concern about the humanitarian impact of the indiscriminate use of all munitions, including incendiary weapons, IEDs, and landmines. These disturbing reports underscore that the universalization and implementation of CCW and its protocols, which represent a fundamental contribution to International Humanitarian Law, is critical if we want to help preclude such activities from taking place in the future. We therefore call on all parties to those conflicts to abide by their obligations under CCW and call for those States not yet party to accede to the CCW and its protocols at the earliest opportunity. Although the United States will make detailed statements with respect to Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) and Mines Other Than Anti-personnel Mines (MOTAPM), I just want to touch on each of those briefly.

The United States has been a strong supporter of the decision by the HCPs to adopt the mandate to discuss LAWS. We continue to believe that CCW, an IHL forum with its mix of policy, military and technical experts, is the right venue to consider this complex and important topic. This subject requires the in depth discussions we have seen at our first two meetings of experts, and we strongly support continuing these discussions next year. We were pleased with the level of participation in the informal meeting of experts but it is clear that this discussion is still in the early stages and further work is required to help shape our understanding of this future technology. The United States believes that it is important to continue our informal discussions in 2016 that should include no less than 5 days of discussion.

As we have said, it is premature to decide where these discussions might or should ultimately lead, but it is important that our work move forward and build upon what was accomplished in 2014 and 2015. We must continue to delve deeper into the issues surrounding LAWS. The United States believes that one important area that deserves our increased attention next year is how states evaluate new weapons systems such as LAWS. As we stated in April, we believe that focusing, in part, on the weapons review process could provide the basis to identify fundamental issues and provide guidance for States that are considering any new weapons system. We believe this would be a positive first step for CCW High Contracting Parties to take while continuing to refine the legal, technical, military, and ethical issues surrounding these complex future weapons systems.
The United States wishes to express its appreciation to UNODA, UNMAS and GICHD for hosting the one-day informal meeting on MOTAPM. This meeting, along with the global study from GICHD and SIPRI last year, demonstrates clearly that the indiscriminate use of certain MOTAPM creates humanitarian problems that should be addressed. We have long supported concluding a legally binding MOTAPM protocol and still prefer that outcome. That said, we see value in the constructive and open discussions we have already had, both formally and informally, in recent years. We therefore believe the issue of MOTAPM should remain on the agenda for future consideration by the High Contracting Parties.

In conclusion Mr. President, the United States looks forward to continuing and refining the substantive informative expert discussions we had in 2015 on LAWS and appreciates the continued consideration of issues surrounding MOTAPM.

Thank you, Mr. President.