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Statement by

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Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)
Session on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)
United Nations, Geneva

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Thank you, Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Biontino of Germany for his excellent Chairmanship of the Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) held in April this year, and for his 'Food for Thought' paper that helped steer the discussion down a substantive and useful avenue.

Mr. President,

Israel is of the view that the CCW continues to be the most appropriate forum in which to discuss future Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems, since it is both an IHL-focused framework and hosts the most relevant actors in this context. Discussions in the framework of the CCW have already promoted, and will continue to promote greater understanding of these weapon systems, and their future implications on the battlefield, in a manner that balances military necessity and humanitarian concerns.

In this context, the expert meeting which was held in April of this year, in a manner similar to the expert meeting that was held in 2014, was insightful, enriching and useful.

The discussions highlighted that it would be difficult, at this stage, to predict how future LAWS would look like, and what their capabilities and limitations will be. The discussion also emphasized that LAWS may be intended to be used in a wide range of operational environments, and that there should be a correlation between the characteristics of each system and its anticipated environment of use. Be that as it may, it was generally accepted that, like every other weapon, LAWS are subject to the Law of Armed Conflict. It was also widely acknowledged that each such system should undergo a preliminary review – legal and technical – before being employed on the battlefield, to ensure its compliance with the Law of Armed Conflict. We support these observations fully.

At the same time, fundamental questions were left open. For example, there seemed to be no agreement as to the exact definition of LAWS, and there were clearly divergent views on questions relating to the appropriate level of human judgment, or control, over LAWS. In relation
to this, many States – including Israel – were not supportive of the call made by some States for a preemptive ban on LAWS.

Mr. President,

Considering the many unknowns and divergent views on this issue, it is our view that an incremental, step by step, approach is not only preferable but inevitable. There is much work still ahead of us in order to effectively assess the various aspects of LAWS and potentially forge shared understandings regarding this issue.

Israel welcomes the important work done so far with regard to LAWS in this forum, and would like to see this work continue. The mandate of the previous meetings of experts, namely "to discuss the questions related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems, in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention", is yet to be exhausted. Therefore, Israel would support renewing a similar mandate, which many States showed interest in discussing in the last meeting of experts.

Thank you, Mr. President.