SIERRA LEONE

2015 MEETING OF THE HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES ON CERTAIN CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS (LAWS)

Statement by Ambassador Yvette Stevens

13th November 2015

Mr Chairman,

As this is the first time I am taking the floor, I would like to first of all congratulate you on your election as the Chair to the 2015 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. We are confident in your leadership as we strive to address the subject of prohibitions or restrictions on the use of certain conventional weapons which may be deemed to be excessively injurious or to have indiscriminate effect – on the mandate of this body. I would also like to thank Ambassador Biontino of Germany for successfully chairing the second Informal Meeting of Experts on LAWS in April this year.

The CCW has now held two informal experts meeting on Lethal Autonomous Weapons, and these have revealed, without doubt, that these weapons deserve to be given the very close attention of this body, which was created for this purpose. We have heard arguments and counter-arguments, but we have also read publications and participated in events, including those at this session, which address some of the claims that we have heard in the informal expert group meetings. These include the claims of cost-effectiveness that could be gained through the use of LAWS, the safety of their applications in marine
environments among other claims. The need for an international agreed framework on the future of LAWS, as originally recommended by the Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions at the 23rd Session of the Human Rights Council, is increasingly apparent.

Advances in science and technology development should be encouraged and applauded but it is their applications which need to be seriously reviewed to ensure that they do not breach international law, and that they conform to ethical and moral standards, and respect fundamental human rights. On no account should the lives of human beings be entrusted entirely to machines.

It is time that the CCW move a step further after two years of informal deliberations on the subject. A formal open-ended Working Group of Experts should be set up as a matter of priority. This Working Group should be charged first and foremost with reviewing the state-of-the-art of the development of increasingly autonomous weapons and should define the cut-off point when these weapons can be considered as not requiring meaningful human control. It should therefore all the areas given in the report of the second informal experts’ group meeting. The Working Group should present a first report with concrete recommendations to the 2016 Review Conference.

Mr Chairman,

We trust that we, as State Parties of the CCW will do the right thing and endorse a formal follow-up mechanism. Meanwhile, as we speak here today, weapons using the latest advances in technology, including artificial intelligence are being developed, tested and used. There is a sense of urgency in addressing LAWS. My delegation therefore suggests that the existing mechanisms for the legal review of all new weapons should be intensified to ensure that the lives of innocent civilians are not unduly lost, while awaiting the results of what could be protracted work by the formal working group. In addition, there is room for a multi-disciplinary groups, including human rights experts, to address the subject and feed into the work of the Working Group.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.