ICRAC STATEMENT FOR CCW Nov 2014

I am speaking on behalf of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (or ICRAC as we are known). We are a founding member of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

We are delighted that the international community represented here has begun the discussions about autonomous weapons systems. And we were very pleased with the informal meeting of experts convened at the CCW last May and would like to thank the Ambassador Simon-Michel for that initiative.

But we do not want the discussions to end here. We urge all state parties to develop their own national policies and come back here for more detailed discussions about how to proceed. And if you come back and say, “we have automated weapons but there will always be a human in the control loop or that appropriate judgement will be used”, we want to know exactly what that means.

It is time to flesh out the detail now. We would like states to consider whether their existing policy statements are sufficiently clear to be recognised by others as constituting meaningful human control. Are they sure that there will be a chance for human deliberation before applying violent force?

We would like to reiterate some of our concerns here.

ICRAC has grave concerns about crossing a fundamental moral line by allowing the delegation of kill decisions to machines.

We have grave concerns about the limitations of the technology of autonomous weapons to comply with International Law

We have grave concerns about the inherent unpredictability of autonomous weapons and the implications that this raises for effective reviews of these weapons systems.

There has often been a danger that one nation imagines gaining great advantages from new technological developments in the belief that other nation’s weapons systems will remain stationary. But this is a mistake and it is not what happens.

So ICRAC has grave concerns about the proliferation of autonomous weapons systems, the potential for a new arms race and the requirement for ever faster response times beyond human capability. This will not foster greater world security or stability.

We have grave concerns about how large numbers of autonomous weapons systems with secret combat algorithms will interact and perhaps trigger unintended conflicts.

In the light of these concerns ICRAC urges states parties to the CCW to move forward in its deliberations. We all still have a lot to learn from each other. It is not going to be an easy road to work out which types of weapons have acceptable levels of human control and which do not. But surely this is what the CCW is here for. And, in keeping with past practice, this would best be achieved by a group of governmental experts.

You have a decision to make now that will shape the future development of the technologies of conflict. Please do not make a move that will ultimately result in the full automation of warfare. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons can and must make a difference to our collective future. Please let us move forward with substantive discussions aimed at new international rules for the benefit of humanity; rules that stop us taking a step into a world were computer programs take the use of violent force from the hands of humans.