Preparatory Committee of the Fifth Review Conference 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

Preparations for Main Committee II - Views of Exchange on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)


Reto Wollenmann
Swiss Delegation

Madam President,

At the outset, let me express through your our gratitude to Ambassador Biontino for his dedication and work which brought the meeting last April to a successful conclusion. He had no easy task.

Our delegation notes that the April meeting further consolidated the consensus that international law, and particularly international humanitarian law (IHL), fully applies to autonomous weapons and has to be respected in all circumstances, and that this consensus constitutes an excellent basis for our future work and should be front and center of any discussion on LAWS. Switzerland will continue to work on the issue on LAWS with this element at the center of our attention, because IHL sets in our view the bar very high in terms of technological prerequisites for the development and lawful use of autonomous weapons systems in armed conflict.

I will not take time to repeat and elaborate on this and other issues that our delegation has raised over the past three years in the CCW. Key elements of our position, including on the
question of legal reviews, are contained in our working paper entitled “Towards a Compli-
ance based approach to LAWS”.

Madam President,

At the third informal meeting of experts we adopted concrete recommendations to the
Review Conference, notably on general principles and understandings as well as on next
steps to consolidate and strengthen our work process.

We fully support what was agreed last April, and what is contained in the Recommendations
to the 2016 Review Conference, submitted by the Chairperson of the Informal Meeting, in
particular the establishment of group of governmental experts dealing with the issue of
LAWS starting in 2017.

There is a great deal of important work ahead of us. To undertake more specific work to-
wards concrete results, we strongly hope that the Review Conference will, based on the rec-
ommendation, be in a position to decide to establish this Group of Governmental Experts
(GGE). The issues to be considered by the GGE, that we agreed to in the April meeting of
experts, are pertinent and give us a good direction for further work.

Finally, with regard to the structure of the GGE: We think this GGE should be allocated suffi-
cient time, to enable us to make real progress. Looking at previous GGEs which had to un-
dertake important work, we note that such meetings were held over multiple weeks, distribut-
ed over a number of years, with sufficient time in between meeting to digest what was dis-
cussed, and to further consult in different format. We think such precedent should inform us
when we decide on the way forward.

Thank you