STATEMENT by GREECE
Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS)
Geneva, 12-17 November 2017

Mr. Chair

At the outset please allow me to congratulate you for your appointment as Chairperson of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). Furthermore, we would like to thank you for the planning and the “food-for-thought” paper you have prepared and shared with the delegations well in advance, as well as to assure you of our delegation’s full support to your endeavours in leading this meeting to a successful outcome.

The Hellenic Republic fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the EU.

Mr. Chair, Dear Colleagues

The Hellenic Republic’s foreign policy is guided by principles, and is based on adhering to and upholding International Law, as well as lending its support to United Nations (UN) initiatives. In this vein, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) is the only relevant forum to address the challenges arisen by the use of “emerging technologies” in weapon systems and their impact on the implementation of the International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

The ongoing discussion on the potential development and use of LAWS constitutes a complicated and challenging issue since we have to address parameters related to their use in conformity with the provisions of the IHL. At the same time, the discussion takes a different dimension when the issue of LAWS is addressed from an ethical or political point of view, bringing to the fore the question of “appropriate human judgment”, as well as the lurking danger of spiraling a new arms race.
Mr. Chair, Dear Colleagues,

Operational Planning is of utmost importance in military strategy and consists of a sequence of steps through which humans formulate overall goals, gather intelligence, select and develop targets, identify the most suitable type of weapon, and decide under what circumstances and preconditions to deploy a particular weapon. In this context, the potential use of LAWS is an ultimate challenge since we are referring to a weapon system that has not been incorporated in the strategic and operational matrix of combat.

However, let’s suppose that fully autonomous lethal weapon systems are developed in the future, and are fully compliant with the IHL and its cardinal principles, such as distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack. Even so in the hypothetical scenario of a weapon system operating with better precision but without being under human control, would we transfer the decision about life or death of humans to a machine? Greece does not feel very comfortable with such a prospect.

The potential use of fully autonomous lethal weapon systems has triggered a number of ethical concerns revolving around their ability to respect human life as well as their capability to accurately discriminate civilians from combatants. The question which subsequently arises is how these ethical concerns can be incorporated into a legal provision whereas, for the time being, the conformity or not of LAWS with IHL remains dubious. The only legal principle which comes to mind is the “Martens Clause”, given its dependence on the dictates of public conscience. Would this general principle suffice to lead to the codification of a new set of legally binding rules in the future? Probably not.

Mr. Chair, Dear Colleagues,

As the Greek Minister of Foreign Affairs stated in his address at the 72nd UNGA our world is changing rapidly today. We are going through the second machine era. An era when machines no longer constitute the extension of physical strength, but rather produce spiritual wealth and knowledge. Machines that are faster and smaller, having yet an immense impact on our daily lives; on the way we work and produce; on the way we communicate and interact. This trend can be described as the fourth industrial revolution.

This new era brings innovations and advantages, but also challenges, especially for states. Challenges that the states need to face effectively if they are to survive in today’s complex international reality.

In this context, where the river of technological development cannot turn back, one of the main challenges which must be addressed is the potential development and use of LAWS, a challenge which is our duty to guide through proper and safe paths, in order for the States to be able both to provide for and address the needs of their people for more human rights.
Therefore, Greece strongly believes that further discussions are necessary in order, to reach a common understanding to define firstly, a Lethal Autonomous Weapon System and, subsequently, to identify the possible way(s) forward.

Thank you.