Characterization of the systems under consideration in order to promote a common understanding on concepts and characteristics relevant to the objectives and purposes of the CCW.

2018 Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

Geneva, April 10, 2018

– As Prepared –

Thank you Chair for giving me the floor.

We would first like to thank you for creating and distributing the chart that catalogs different views about the characterization of systems. We believe that it will be helpful tool for delegations.

• We would also like to thank the many delegations that have put their views in writing so that such a chart could be compiled.

We would also like to confirm to the Chair and other delegations that the portion drawn from the U.S. working paper from November 2017 is a sufficient summary of the most relevant parts of that paper for our purposes yesterday and today.

To supplement the summary in the chart, I would like to highlight some additional thoughts from our November 2017 working paper on characterizing LAWS.

The United States continues to believe that it is unnecessary for the GGE to adopt a specific working definition of LAWS.

• We, however, support identifying general characteristics of the systems under consideration in order to promote the GGE’s understanding of the relevant concepts and issues in these GGE discussions.

• We believe that the absence of a specific working definition is no impediment to the GGE’s work in understanding the potential issues poses by LAWS. Given that international humanitarian law provides a robust and coherent system of regulation for the use of weapons, the GGE can discuss the issues potentially posed by “LAWS” under the object and purpose of the CCW without needing to agree on a specific working definition of LAWS.

We think that developing a working definition in the abstract, prior to deciding on a policy outcome, would be premature.

• A working definition should not be drafted with a view toward describing weapons that should be banned. This would be premature and counterproductive because
it would divert time and effort from understanding the issues to negotiating what would be covered. As the High Contracting Parties have not decided to negotiate or adopt a new protocol specifically to ban or regulate LAWS, any common understanding of LAWS must not prejudice future decisions regarding potential outcomes.

We nonetheless support identifying general characteristics of the systems under consideration in order to promote our understanding of the relevant concepts of issues in these GGE discussions. Identifying general characteristics of these systems will help delegations understand what is generally referred to by the terms we are using, without providing a definition that would establish the parameters of what is, or is not, included. This flexibility in approach is important given that scientists and engineers continue to develop new technological advancements and that our understanding continues to improve.

Lastly, we appreciate the Chair’s thoughtful description of the four approaches delegation have used to characterize LAWS.

• Although we are not of the view that the GGE would have to agree on any one specific approach to frame its work, we think these approaches are each to varying degrees helpful in identifying and understanding the relevant concepts in these discussions. We will think about ways in which these approaches could help improve our understanding of the relevant concepts or issues in these GGE discussions.

Later today, we may seek to take the floor to offer further views on regarding characteristics of the systems that should be under the GGE’s consideration.

Thank you.