Statement by Ireland

Options to address challenges

Chair

Our consideration of LAWS has raised ethical, legal and military-technical issues. These aspects must be included in any consideration of the options available to address the challenges presented by Autonomous Weapons Systems.

First of all we believe we need a clear working definition or characterisation of Autonomous Weapons Systems in order to provide a firm foundation for our future work. Many delegations have shared our concern about the concept of lethality and while we support your decision to park the issue it has not gone away and it will have to be tackled during our future work. We have proposed a draft wording for a working definition and we are open to other suggestions that will provide a basis for our future work. It would be useful if this GGE were in a position to include a recommended working definition or characterisation of these systems in the report to the meeting of states parties next November.

Chair

My delegation has been encouraged by the level of consensus evident in the Room this week on the ethical issue, in that the great majority if not all delegations have accepted that the decision to use force must be made by humans and that all weapons must remain under effective or meaningful human control. It would be beneficial if this measure of agreement could be captured in some way and thus provide another strong foundation to our future work.

Chair

On the legal aspects of Autonomous Weapons Systems there has been a greater divergence of views. Nevertheless we had already agreed under your leadership last November that International Humanitarian Law applies to the use of all weapons during armed conflict, including autonomous weapons. During this meeting we noticed that while some states felt that existing IHL was sufficient to deal with the issue, there was also considerable support for additional rules to address the IHL challenges presented by autonomous weapons. One way to capture the consensus on the ethical issue would be to consider legally binding regulations that would confirm in the form of a legal obligation the recognised necessity to only use autonomous weapons which are under human control. It would also be useful to audit the relevant elements of IHL to examine how they can be best implemented in the context of autonomous weapons use. This audit could include inter alia provisions on reviews of means and methods of warfare, on protection of civilians, the sick, the wounded and persons hors de combat and on compliance with the rules of distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack.

Chair
This week we were reminded again of the considerable technical and military complexities of modern and future weapons and weapons control, detection and targeting systems. It was evident how quickly these technologies are evolving and how difficult it would be to establish durable technical standards on design, deployment and control. In this context it would be useful to consider establishing an oversight regime, possibly a subsidiary body within the CCW framework, to monitor on a continuous basis emerging autonomous weapons applications and be in a position to report to states parties on their likely compliance with IHL. It may also be possible to draft a best practices guide to the implementation of IHL when using weapons systems with autonomous capacities, a guide that would be regularly updated to keep pace with technological developments.

Chair

We feel that the measures we have proposed to address ethical, legal and technical challenges are not excessive and are within the capacity of States Parties to develop and agree. We of course accept that other valuable proposals have been made already and will be made in the future and we look forward to considering all such options in our future work under your leadership.

Thank you Chair