Mr. Chairman

Allow me to express our high appreciation for your guidance and commitment as chairman of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems.

Back in April, the focused and productive discussions, held within the GGE, on the sophisticated issue of autonomous weapons systems were really helpful for improving shared understanding on related technologies.

However, the multidimensional nature of LAWS creates grounds for varying interpretations among State Parties on ideas and concepts related to the characterization of the systems under consideration.

As there is absence of agreement regarding the elaboration of a preliminary working definition on LAWS, we believe that the State Parties should concentrate on outlining a certain set of characteristics and criteria for a weapons system to be designated as LAWS. Delineating characteristics is necessary in order to avoid any misconceptions on the scope of the autonomous systems and to progress the deliberations. Negotiating and defining attributes should neither prejudge any future outcomes and potential policies, nor restrict the research and development in the private sector and academia.

Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to thank you for summarizing the four approaches on characterization that are truly beneficial and facilitate the deliberations on this agenda item.

In our view, when outlining characteristics, the most important touchstone should be the level of autonomy in a system’s performance of its critical functions of identifying, intercepting and attacking a certain target. Autonomy in the targeting cycle of a weapons system should be defined by system's ability to independently make a decision to use force and subsequently apply it without human involvement in the process.

To better understand the notion of autonomy, it should be considered in relation to human-machine interaction and the concept of human control. As the level of autonomy is inversely proportionate to the degree of human involvement, higher autonomy means less human control. A statement already made by the Brazilian delegation.
In this regard our delegation does not consider automated, remotely operated and semi-autonomous systems as LAWS. We believe that the focus of the GGE should be on fully autonomous weapons systems, which in our understanding as of today do not yet exist.

The systems under consideration raise many humanitarian, moral and ethical concerns. As human control must be exercised regarding the use of lethal force, life and death choices must be made by humans, not machines.

Bulgaria shares other delegations' view that the term “lethality” is not an inherent attribute to the systems under consideration. Autonomous systems are not to be designed with the single goal of eliminating human beings. As every other weapons system, they could inflict non-fatal injuries, not to mention the anti-material weapons systems. The latter are to be directed against missiles, vehicles, vessels, aircrafts. Yet the use of anti-material autonomous weapons systems could cause the death of militaries and civilians.

Speaking of autonomous weapons systems' characterization we should mention the fast evolving technologies such as machine and deep learning that give them the opportunity to develop self-education capabilities. Self-learning enhances system's autonomy as it allows an autonomous system to develop better situational awareness once deployed on the battlefield and to change and adapt its behaviors depending on the current situation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman