Mr. Chairperson,

Please allow me to begin by thanking you for the effective and transparent way in which you have continued to conduct your chairmanship of this GGE. In addition to the statement by the European Union I would like to emphasize some key issues we see as important from a national point of view. We have also prepared a joint working paper together with Estonia for this meeting in an attempt to provide a technical and legal perspective to categorizing lethal autonomous weapons systems. We hope delegations find the paper useful and thought-provoking.

Mr. Chairperson,

When considering the human element in the use of lethal force, Finland believes that compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law is a key component. The notion that humans will now and in the future exert control over decisions of life and death needs to remain at the center of our deliberations. Compliance with IHL is a key requirement that States need to always fulfill in any case and without prejudice to any possible outcome of this GGE.

In the GGE we should focus on defining the main elements of autonomy, especially in the critical phases of a weapon’s operating cycle. Not only is there a need to understand the meaning of autonomy, it may be necessary to elaborate on different dimensions and degrees of autonomy. While a reference to full autonomy may at first seem convenient for categorizing weapon systems, there is no technological reference point when a system becomes fully autonomous.

Importantly, autonomy is not an on/off feature, so instead of “autonomous systems” it would be better to use the expression “systems having autonomous features or functions”. In the LAWS context, it is important to keep the focus on the targeting cycle and the conditions of the authorization to use lethal force.
To create results that can withstand time, the discussions on LAWS must reflect the undeniable direction of technological development. The development of artificial intelligence should be seen as a logical progress in computing science. Past experience has shown that once new technology proves to work, society quickly adopts it, and later its use becomes the accepted norm. Now and in the foreseeable future, both automated and autonomous systems perform tasks assigned by human operators, who bear ultimate responsibility for the use of the systems.

Human control in LAWS is context specific; it varies throughout the weapons operating cycle as has been the case for many years already. The kind and degree of human control that must be exercised at various points leading up to and including the use of a weapon depend heavily on the nature of the weapon and circumstances of its use. Clearly, however, if the ability of the operator to exert control over the weapon is restricted – e.g. because of the autonomous capabilities of the weapon system – the designers and manufacturers must exert more control and bear greater responsibility. We see merit in discussing this matter more in depth in our deliberations.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, Finland sees this body, the Group of Governmental Experts working under the auspices of the CCW, as the relevant forum for discussions on LAWS. We are in favor of extending the mandate of the GGE into the year 2019.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.