Joint statement by the delegations of France and Germany on agenda item “Possible options for addressing the humanitarian and international security challenges”, GGE on LAWS, 29 August 2018

Mr. Chairman,

1. Thank you for the floor. Please allow the delegations of France and Germany to make a joint statement reflecting on the way forward for this GGE-process.

2. Under your chairmanship, this Group has been able to make considerable progress in exploring the complex issues related to lethal autonomous weapons systems in their legal, ethical, military and technical dimensions. Given the progress this group has achieved in defining and analyzing the objects under discussion, France and Germany are convinced that it is now both possible and timely to move ahead. We now hope to be able to build on the substance we have gathered in our discussions in order to focus our attention on exploring possible options for addressing the challenges posed by lethal autonomous weapons systems, as stipulated in the mandate of this group.

3. We should acknowledge that there are considerable expectations for the work being done by this Group of Governmental Experts. The dynamics of science and industry are producing rapid advances in artificial intelligence which can also be used for military applications and, as we have seen, raise a number of questions. Our diplomatic and military efforts should enable us to deal with those developments and to take appropriate measures in a coordinated and cooperative manner.

4. France and Germany fully appreciate and respect the range of different positions expressed by high contracting parties on the way forward. We see that much value may be found in remaining seized and reviewing the complexities of the manifold technical and military developments related to LAWS in order to better understand the associated challenges and ramifications.
It is our conviction however that the identification of an exact definition is not necessarily a prerequisite to identify the relevant principles and values that should guide us with regards to emerging technologies related to Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. While we don’t know all about the complexities of potential lethal autonomous weapons systems, we do know the ethical values we need to defend and the principles of international law which apply to the use of weapons in international conflicts.

We therefore suggest moving our discussions forward in a result-oriented way to explore concrete options for recommendations on how to effectively address the challenges arising from lethal autonomous weapons systems while neither hampering scientific progress nor the consideration of the beneficial aspects of emerging technologies in the area of LAWS for future use, including possible avenues to improve implementation of International Humanitarian Law.

5. France and Germany have jointly proposed a Political Declaration as an instrument to guide future developments of the use of autonomy in weapon systems in line with existing international law and based on shared ethical standards. We are convinced that such a Political Declaration could offer an acceptable middle ground to accommodate the shared interests of all high contracting parties.

With the proposed Political Declaration High Contracting Parties would commit themselves to upholding important principles such as
- full applicability of the rules of international law,
- human accountability for the use of lethal weapon systems,
- responsibility for their design and employment,
- ultimate human decision-making over the use of lethal force,
- sufficient human control over lethal weapons systems stipulating sufficient information and understanding of the weapons system in use and of the operating environment as well as the interaction between the two,
- the development by High Contracting Parties of practical national measures to implement these commitments.
6. This approach would allow us to agree on overarching principles to address the challenges arising from LAWS in a comprehensive manner. CCW High contracting parties should continue to maintain a high level of vigilance on this issue and, as needed, develop complementary measures to respond to specific challenges not yet identified posed by potential LAWS.

7. France and Germany as well as a number of countries across geographic groups have already stated their support for exploring a Political Declaration. We look forward to hearing the views of more high contracting parties on options to address the challenges related to emerging technologies in the area of LAWS.

8. France and Germany look forward to hearing the reflections of High Contracting Parties on these proposals. We will continue our joint work on a draft Political Declaration which we will submit to the GGE at an appropriate time.