Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)
Geneva, 09-13 April 2018
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

Intervention by Bulgaria

Mr. Chairman

The multidimensional nature of LAWS requires an interdisciplinary approach. It is in our view that to properly frame the debate and avoid misperceptions on the scope of the emerging technologies in the area of LAWS, the GGE should formulate a preliminary working definition for the purpose of discussions - one that would be beneficial for attaining a mutual understanding of concepts and characteristics on related technologies.

State parties should delineate certain characteristics and criteria for a weapons system to be considered as LAWS. The degree of human involvement in a system’s performance of its critical functions of identifying, intercepting and attacking a certain target should be the most crucial criteria. The level of autonomy should be the spotlight of defining the systems under consideration.

In this regard we think that as the GGE delves into the characteristics of LAWS, the main focus of elaborating a working definition should be on fully autonomous weapons systems. In our understanding fully autonomous weapons systems do not exist. Bulgaria do not consider non-autonomous systems such as automated, remotely operated, and tele operated systems to be LAWS.

As autonomous weapons systems raise a lot of humanitarian concerns, human control must be retained in regard to the use of lethal force. Life and death decisions must taken by humans, not machines.

Another issue of importance for the current deliberations concerns the nature of the technologies used for the development of autonomous systems. Artificial intelligence systems are those who perform tasks in a way humans consider “smart”. Machine learning systems, on the other hand, are way more advanced. Machine learning assumes that a system given access to data can learn for itself. An autonomous system can also gain knowledge through deployment simulations or from its own experience in an armed conflict. This self learning process allows it to adjust itself and improve, eventually becoming an ever changing adaptive system.

As defining characteristics and elements of autonomous weapons systems, States should not in any way impede the research and development processes in the civilian sector.
Thank you, Mr. Chairman