Mr. Chairperson,

In addition to the statement by the European Union I would like to emphasize some issues from a national point of view.

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 be at the center of our deliberations. Legal reviews undertaken in accordance with article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions are essential in the study, development, acquisition or adoption of new weapons.

We should focus on defining the main elements of autonomy, especially in the critical phases of a weapon's operating cycle. We seem to get bogged down quite easily if we approach this only from a technological point of view. Aiming to find a common definition of LAWS could be helpful, but we also recognize the inherent difficulty therein. There may be a need to clarify automation from autonomy and autonomy from complete technological singularity. We feel that the lines still get blurred when discussing these terms.

If I may provoke Mr. Chairperson, I would like to question the notion of a “fully autonomous” system. Autonomy is always relative, it is autonomy from something. No entity, nor any human, is able to perform competently in every task and situation. On the other hand, even the simplest machine can seem to function “autonomously” if the task and context are sufficiently constrained. Full
autonomy in itself is an abstract concept which borders on technological singularity.

We tend to observe all types of warfare through the same lens whereas in reality the use of LAWS on the battlefield contains various aspects. For instance, the time dimension in an attack mode; the period during which the target, scope and proportion of the use of the weapon needs to be determined; can be hours or even days. When using defense capabilities, however, decisions need to be taken very rapidly, perhaps during minutes or seconds and often with incomplete information. This puts tremendous strain on the decision making process; for humans and machines alike.

We feel there is room to discuss LAWS even if these systems are not yet in use on the battlefield. For the sake of comparison, the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine was negotiated under the auspices of the Council of Europe in 1997 without full knowledge of future technology. The Convention set out a series of principles against the misuse of biological and medical advances. The Convention's starting point is that the interests of human beings must come before the interests of science or society. Perhaps there is something we can learn from these negotiations in our endeavor.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairperson, Finland is grateful for this opportunity to share views and we look forward to continued close cooperation with your team, all High Contracting Parties and the NGO community. You may count on our full support.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.