Dear Mr. President,

Since 2014 the issue of LAWS has been discussed at the CCW. After four years of discussions we believe it is time for states to take steps to deal with the legal, ethical and security concerns related to LAWS. We sincerely hope this week and the one in August will be the basis to take a decision in November to start negotiations on an international legally binding instrument.

But the CCW is of course not the only arena where progress can be made. This is indeed truly a multi stakeholder issue and we believe the issue of LAWS concerns us all; states, the military, civil society, AI and robotics experts, companies and the financial sector. We all have a role to play, both inside the CCW but also outside.

There was a lot of media attention last week on the open letter from Google employees stating that “Google should not be in the business of war”. We also saw the South Korean University responding to a possible boycott by stating that it does not have any intention to engage in the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems. These are good examples that there are many actors that can take steps to prevent the development and use of LAWS, or, better said— to ensure there is meaningful human control over the use of force.

As some of you know, my organisation PAX works on the issue of disinvestment by financial institutions from controversial weapons, amongst others cluster munitions and nuclear weapons. In the upcoming months we will explore ways of engaging with tech companies and the financial sector on the issue of LAWS as well. How to make sure that companies develop a code-of-conduct? A code of conduct which can then be used by the financial sector as one of the criteria used in their decision in which companies to invest and in which not?

Let me conclude by shortly mentioning some of the arguments we heard over the last years and that we find worrisome:

First is the tendency to overcomplicate LAWS. As interesting as all the related issues are, the core of the issue remains that we want to maintain MHC over the critical functions of the selection and engagement of targets.

Second is the tendency to state that the emergence of LAWS is inevitable. We believe we should all be better than that. If we want to keep something – meaningful control over selection and attack of targets – we should be able to do so. The stakes are too high and we do have a choice here and if we don’t use this, the choice will be made for us and it will be impossible to go back.

Third is the tendency to speak in terms of ‘we’ as a user state, but in the end there won’t be a world of haves and have nots. These weapons, if developed, will proliferate rapidly, and just imagine LAWS being used against your own troops or against civilians of your own state.

Fourth is the tendency to state that a treaty is too hard to enforce. But it is better to have a treaty that takes extra efforts to enforce, than a world flooded with systems being used without MHC over its critical functions.

Summing up, we believe that states urgently need to decide where to draw the line of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable regarding autonomy in weapon systems. They should focus on how to retain human control over weapon systems to ensure that ethical legal and ethical norms are met. It’s our sincere hope that this week will be a step forward in getting us there.

Thank you.