Thank you Mr. Chairman

The United States welcomes this first session of the 2018 GGE, and we look forward to continuing the valuable discussions started last November. The CCW is uniquely suited to hold these discussions, given its focus on international humanitarian law and given that delegations of High Contracting Parties routinely include members with military, technical, and policy experience. We believe that the quality of the GGE discussions and their usefulness will continue to be enhanced by the substantive contributions of such governmental experts.

Mr. Chairman, we wish to thank you for your efforts to arrange and guide this GGE. We believe that this substantive review of the technological, military, and legal/ethical considerations associated with emerging technologies in the area of LAWS is a valuable contribution to the work of the CCW. Our discussions have provided plenty of food for thought, and it is clear that many governments, including that of the United States, are still trying to understand more fully the ways that autonomy will be used by their societies, including by their militaries. There remains a lack of common understanding on various issues related to LAWS, including their characteristics and elements. We recognize that these are complex issues, and we need to continue to educate ourselves and deepen our collective understanding.

The United States believes that IHL provides a robust and appropriate framework for the regulation of all weapons – including those with autonomous functions – in relation to armed conflict, and any development or use of LAWS must be fully consistent with IHL, including the principles of military necessity, humanity, distinction, and proportionality. For this reason, the United States places great importance on the weapon review process in the development and acquisition of new weapon systems. This is a critical measure in ensuring that weapon systems can dependably be used in a manner that is consistent with IHL. We continue to believe that best practices for reviewing weapon systems that use autonomy are an especially productive area for continued discussions, as a number of other delegations have also suggested.

The United States also continues to believe that advances in autonomy and machine learning can facilitate and enhance the implementation of IHL, including the principles of distinction and proportionality. One of our goals is to understand more fully how this technology can continue to be used to reduce the risk to civilians and friendly forces in armed conflict.
The United States is committed to playing an active and constructive role in this GGE, including by sharing our experience in addressing issues related to autonomy in weapon systems and substantively contributing to discussions that we hope will continue to be grounded more in reality than in speculative scenarios. We expect that substantive “reality-based” discussions will greatly contribute to States’ and the public’s understandings of the challenges and benefits that could be presented by LAWS.

Although we believe that advances in autonomy and machine learning can continue to facilitate and enhance the implementation of IHL, we don’t believe that it is possible for anyone to predict with any real certainty the true challenges and benefits of future AI and autonomy-related technologies. Although we certainly can learn from current State practice related to the use of autonomy in weapon systems, it remains premature, and we think unwise, to try to prejudge the future. The issues presented by LAWS are complex and evolving, as new technologies and their applications continue to be developed. We therefore must be cautious not to make hasty judgments about the value or likely effects of emerging or future technologies. As history shows, our views of new technologies may change over time as we find new uses and ways to benefit from advances in technology. In particular, we want to encourage innovation and progress in furthering the objects and purposes of the Convention. We therefore do not support the negotiation of a political or legally binding document. Rather, we believe we should continue to proceed collectively — with deliberation and patience.