For years it has been clear that, the rapid progress in technology, particularly in the area of autonomous weapons and AI will impact armed conflict and might even change the future of warfare. This recognition brought the CCW to the establishment of expert work on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS. After five years expert discussion in the CCW, urgent action is needed. The increasing use of autonomous technologies raise a series of fundamental legal, ethical, military and security concerns, which require to be addressed urgently by the international community. Human responsibility and accountability for the use of force must be safeguarded.

The past two days once again demonstrated that ensuring meaningful effective human control is as the core of our work. This was reflected in the fact that under each agenda item the centrality of the human element was the starting point for most delegations` interventions. The UN SG Guterres stated in his opening message: “I know of no State or armed force in favor of fully autonomous weapon systems empowered to take human life.” Many
delegations expressed that they have no intention to develop LAWS. This is reassuring.

However, given the gravity of the potential impact of the development of LAWS, common shared and binding limitations are indispensable to safeguard compliance with IL, and IHL in particular, as my delegation laid out comprehensively yesterday.

We share the view expressed earlier that artificial intelligence and self-learning elements raise questions as to how frequently do an autonomous weapon system would need to be reviewed. Weapons reviews are important measures to review the legality of new weapons. Weapon reviews are helpful to establish, whether a weapon per se would be permitted or not - according to the interpretation of existing international law by the relevant state. We welcome all efforts to strengthen article 36. As demonstrated again by our discussions over the past days, there is a lack of legal clarity, common criteria and transparency with regard to article 36. The commitment of my delegation to prevent the erosion of the legally and ethically acceptable is clear.

Given the potential of negative consequences and a potential erosion of our IL and in particular IHL norms, it seems to my delegation that it is our common interest for the benefit and security of all to clarify international norms and law preemptively. For we take from most interventions that legal clarity is missing. Only legal clarity can provide a legal instrument.

Mr. Chair,

Austria remains convinced that diplomacy should not be overtaken by realities on the ground. This is a unique opportunity for states to jointly act in the common interest. We should seize the momentum before it is gone. The CCW
faces both the opportunity and the necessity to act. As demonstrated by the proposal of Austria, Brazil and Chile to start negotiations to ensure human control over critical functions, Austria is ready to start negotiations. Only in negotiations we will be able to clarify the open points. The nature of negotiations will allow us to focus on the essential and to establish limits to autonomy for the benefit of security of humankind.

We are among the many delegations that believe that the CCW should live up to its task of a norm-setting forum – now the clock is ticking. We cannot stop technological progress nor do we want to do so, but it is incumbent on us to act to ensure that the clear legal framework prevents developments, that we believe none of us would like to see.