Agenda Item 5 (e): Possible options for addressing the humanitarian and international security challenges posed by emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention without prejudicing policy outcomes and taking into account past, present and future proposals

Mr Chair,

Ireland aligns itself with Statement made by the European Union and would like to add the following intervention in a national capacity.

Chair

At the outset I would like to thank you for your leadership this week and for the preparatory groundwork, including the guiding questions issued in advance of this meeting. This approach has helped to focus the direction of our deliberations and build on important aspects of the guiding principles agreed last August.
While much of our discussion so far this week has once again focused on the potential risks and benefits of ‘autonomy’ in aspects of weapons systems, there is broad consensus that some form or degree of human control is needed in the use of weapons systems to comply with IHL. While this is a positive development and builds on our work from last year, we also recognise that this broad consensus belies a diversity of views on how human control should be conceptualised or understood, and on how any requirement for human control might be framed.

Chair

As we made clear in our earlier intervention this week, Ireland is of the view that identifying and reaching a common understanding on the concepts and characteristics relevant to LAWS can aid in our consideration of the most suitable response for addressing the humanitarian and international security challenges posed by LAWS.

The food for thought paper we submitted along with Belgium and Luxembourg is an effort to further elaborate our thinking on this question. Through the identification of certain characteristics of weapon systems which could be deemed problematic from a legal, humanitarian and ethical point of view, we can start to focus on ways to mitigate or address these problems. While not an exhaustive list, we identified each of the following characteristics as problematic in the first instance:

1. The ability to run through a targeting cycle, with the final intention to apply lethal force, without any human intervention;
2. The ability to switch to lethal mode without any human intervention;
3. The inability to interrupt or deactivate the autonomous mode; and
4. The ability to redefine its mission or objective without any human intervention.

The common thread that runs through each of these problematic characteristics is the absence of human intervention or human control.
Ireland has retained a consistent position in our discussions on the need to ensure human control in the use of force. It is only by retaining human agency in the decision to use force that we can we ensure full compliance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). However, we also recognise that control exercised by humans can take various forms and degrees at different stages of development, deployment, activation and use.

Chair
My delegation regards the area of LAWS as one of the most pressing issues facing the disarmament agenda, with their development and deployment raising serious ethical, moral and legal questions, with the possibility of reshaping modern warfare, contravening International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law, and exacerbating asymmetries of power between states.

We perceive that there is an urgent need for tangible policy responses to address these challenges. In the short term, we see merit in a political declaration as a statement of agreed principles among States. As noted by Germany and France this week, the elaboration of the Guiding Principles agreed by the GGE last year may be a good starting point for such a declaration. However, we also see merit in developing a legal instrument designed to ensure human control over decisions on the use of force by means of autonomous weapons.

Chair
Ireland attaches high priority on working towards agreement on proposals to ensure compliance with IHL and ensure human control over existing and emerging weapon systems with increasing autonomous functions.

Thank You.