Mr. President,

Allow me to first welcome you to Geneva and congratulate you upon your appointment as the President of this Meeting of High Contracting Parties. I assure you of my delegation’s full support. Austria remains fully committed to the CCW, its annexed protocols and their implementation.

Austria fully aligns itself with the EU Statement. In our national capacity we wish to add the following three points.

First, the CCW would be well placed to address the fundamental challenges posed by rapidly increasing levels of autonomy to IL, and to IHL in particular. Austria supports immediate negotiations on regulation of LAWS through a legally binding instrument in order to ensure meaningful human control over selecting and engaging targets. It is a legal, ethical and moral imperative that humans must remain in control of armed conflict and that human control over the weapons developed, deployed and used is maintained. The GGE LAWS bears a special responsibility in this regard. It is in our shared security interest (and vital for the credibility of our process) that the GGE delivers useful, credible and tangible results. In this spirit we are looking forward to the adoption of the 11 guiding principles by this conference as a step to prepare future negotiations of a legally-binding instrument. Towards the Review Conference the group should use its past work as a basis for the clarification, consideration and development of aspects of the normative and operational framework (on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS). Further, Austria believes that it will be key for the success of the GGE LAWS to focus and advance on the issue of human control.

Second, when armed conflict is fought in urban areas, civilians often bear the highest cost in the short, medium and long-term. It is particularly appalling that more than 90% of the victims are civilians when explosive weapons with wide area effects are used in populated areas. These facts put our commitment to IHL and especially the principles of distinction, precautions in attack and proportionality to a test- this is an urgent call for action. Therefore Austria recently hosted the Vienna Conference on Protecting Civilians in Urban Warfare. We are heartened by the interest of so many states in advancing the protection of civilians from the use of EWIPA. The broad participation of 133 States from all regions and many international organisations and civil society is encouraging and we look forward to embarking on the elaboration of a political declaration starting next week. Austria appreciates substance oriented discussions on the topic in the CCW and is thus looking
forward to further discussions on how to work better together to strengthen the implementation of IL and IHL.

Third, a sound financial situation is the backbone of our Convention. Financial obligations cannot be neglected. In this regard, Austria welcomes the paper presented by the President.

I thank you.