Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

Geneva, 13-15 November 2019

Consideration of the report of the Group of Governmental Experts on the emerging technologies in the area of LAWS (GGE LAWS)

Intervention by Bulgaria

Mr. Chairman,

Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and will make the following remarks in national capacity.

First, allow me express our high appreciation to 2019 Chair Gjorgjinski for his devoted efforts towards the successful conduct of the GGE deliberations throughout the year.

Our delegation welcomes the final Report of the 2019 session of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems as it creates a solid ground upon which the Group to concentrate its endeavors for future activities ahead of the 2021 Review Conference.

Bulgaria expresses its full endorsement for the 11 Guiding Principles on LAWS. We deem the agreement on and the expected endorsement of the Guiding Principles as a pivotal breakthrough and an indispensable step for the GGE. Nonetheless, the act of endorsement should not be perceived as closing them, as an abundance of work in consideration of legal, technological and military aspects on LAWS still lies ahead of the Group.

The Guiding Principles represent a major accomplishment and an important tool to steer the activities of the Group and the efforts of the States Parties, to build upon and improve and to put in use. Therefore we strongly support the incorporation of the affirmed Guiding Principles into the processes of formulating national policies and of conducting practices.

As a further step our delegation shares the call to operationalize the Guiding Principles. In pursuit of commonalities on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS, States Parties should work on conceiving and formulating additional guiding principles, especially on human-machine interaction as a main element of the debate and the work of the GGE.
The multifaceted character of the autonomous weapons systems and the varying comprehensions among delegations on related technologies aggravate the GGE debate. Therefore, in our view the Group should focus on the human-machine interaction and the concept of human control, including the issue of attribution, and its applicability in compliance with the international humanitarian law and its core principles. In this regard we would like to state that law pertains to humans and accountability cannot be transferred to a machine. The ultimate decision over life and death belongs to a human being, who exercise control over the use of force.

We reiterate our position from August in support of Portugal’s proposal that it would be of use to compile all existing international law norms applicable to autonomous weapons systems. Such effort would be instrumental in ensuring full compliance with IHL norms and its principles in the process of development, deployment and use of such systems.

We also consider conducting legal weapons reviews under Article 36 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Convention to be an important instrument in guaranteeing that development, acquisition and adoption of a new weapon, mean and methods of warfare, duly complies with IHL rules and regulations. Additional transparency enhancing and confidence building measures could include exchange of information on implementation of existing applicable international law and sharing best practices in the context of autonomous weapons systems.

Mr. Chairman

The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons demonstrates to be the most appropriate and relevant international venue for discussions, exchange of views and expertise among broad range of stakeholders on issues and concepts related to the emerging technologies in the area of LAWS in the light of technology, military effects and legal and ethical considerations.

Bulgaria embraces the position that all States Parties should collaborate proactively and in a constructive manner to clarify, consider and develop aspects of an effective and comprehensive normative and operational framework on LAWS and to further negotiate solid recommendations for consideration during the 2021 CCW Review Conference.

Such process requires allocation of substantial number of days for expert work. In this regard, seven days for discussions within the Group in 2019 proved to be deficient. Therefore, our delegation share the call the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS to meet over the period of 30 days in the next two years in order to keep the momentum
and advance discussions further ahead towards achieving substantive progress and results ahead of the 2021 CCW Review Conference.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman