

Group of Governmental Experts session 6-10 March 2023
Aotearoa New Zealand intervention – 6 March 2023

Thank you Chair.

Please also let me extend our appreciation to you for taking up the mantle of chair for a second year running – it is great to see you back on the podium – and it should come as no surprise that you have the full support of my delegation as you conduct your duties this week.

Chair, as you said this morning, May will be the product of March. We're encouraged by the productive start we have been able to achieve so far today. We thank those delegations who have prepared and submitted new substantive proposals this year, and we look forward to discussing them across the course of the week.

We also want to acknowledge the political leadership shown by those countries who have held, or will hold, conferences, relevant to autonomous weapons systems this year. These have helped to create a sense of momentum, and have provided a forum for further discussions on these important issues. This has been highly encouraging.

So far today, we have been pleased to hear repeated references to a two tier approach. It is fair to say there is strong convergence around this, and we look forward to this being reflected in a concrete outcome.

Chair, we agree with others that collectively we have generated a body of valuable papers and contributions, including the Joint Statement made at UNGA First Committee in October 2022. We take the opportunity here to also recall the joint working paper of 23 states that New Zealand was pleased to co-sponsor in 2022.

New Zealand in 2021 released its national policy position on autonomous weapons systems. It reflects this two-tier approach, and I take the opportunity to restate some of our policy's key elements – we wish to see AWS whose effects cannot be anticipated or controlled, and which cannot comply with IHL, to be prohibited, while regulating others in a manner to ensure the human element is retained over decisions about whether and how force is used in conflict. This policy position also provides us with the option of considering interim measures that move us closer towards this goal. Noting this and the proposals submitted recently, we stand ready to engage constructively throughout this week on these. But it's worth being clear that we share the view just expressed by one delegation that they should not be a replacement for something binding.

Chair, once again let me thank you for your leadership as we work towards the concrete outcome that is so urgently required. We look forward to constructive engagement this week as we intensify our work.

I thank you.