Seventh Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

18 November 2026

English only

Geneva, 16–20 November 2026
Item 14 of the provisional agenda
Consideration of proposals for additional protocols to the Convention and other proposals

Negotiating a legally binding instrument on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

Working paper submitted by Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Ireland, New Zealand, Panama and Mexico*

1. The Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW) was conceived as a dynamic framework. Its preamble reaffirms 'the need to continue the codification and progressive development of the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict' and expresses the wish 'to prohibit or restrict further the use of certain conventional weapons'. The Convention provides the means to do so through negotiating and adopting Protocols.

2. Deliberations on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) have taken place within CCW for thirteen years. Since the first meeting of experts established by the 2013 Meeting of High Contracting Parties, the CCW has produced multiple reports that have contributed to developing common understandings of the legal, military, technical, humanitarian and ethical considerations, amongst others, surrounding these weapons.

3. These developments have taken place against the backdrop of rapid technological advancements, increasing concerns regarding the development and use of weapons systems incorporating autonomous functions, and repeated calls, including in UNGA resolutions on LAWS, to commence negotiations on an instrument establishing clear prohibitions and restrictions on autonomous weapons systems.

4. Most recently, the conclusion of the three-year mandate of the open-ended Group of Governmental Experts on Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (GGE-LAWS) resulted in the adoption by consensus of a set of elements of an instrument, without prejudging its nature, and other possible measures to address these weapon systems.

5. The final report of the GGE-LAWS contained an agreed working characterisation of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, clarified through its accompanying Chair's interpretative declaration. [1]

*The present document is being issued without formal editing.

[1] "Paragraph 25, and I have said it on numerous occasions, is a working characterization. The characterization is framed in terms of capability. The words "is capable of" govern the whole of what follows, including the manner of engagement. The characterization does not turn on the purpose for which a system was designed, or on its primary function. The Group considered and did not adopt proposals framed in those terms. What matters is what the system is capable of doing. The chapeau of

Please recycle

6. The outcomes of the GGE, in combination with previous agreements and understandings over the past decade, represent a solid basis for taking forward High Contracting Parties' work on this matter and the need to move beyond deliberations by translating the progress achieved into concrete prohibitions and regulations in the form a new Protocol to the Convention aimed at preventing and reducing the humanitarian impact of these weapons.

A Unique Opportunity and a Path Forward to Commencing Negotiations

7. The 2026 CCW Review Conference offers High Contracting Parties a unique opportunity to build on the extensive work of the GGE-LAWS and to demonstrate the continued relevance and capacity of the CCW to respond effectively to the various challenges posed by rapid technological developments in the field of military autonomy, progressing its normative framework to emerging methods and means of warfare.

8. In this regard, the progress achieved thus far should now be translated into the negotiation of a legally binding instrument, in the form of new Protocol, establishing clear prohibitions and restrictions applicable to LAWS.

9. While certain important legal, humanitarian, ethical and technical questions remain to be addressed, these should be taken forward through a negotiating process, rather than through another cycle of deliberations.

10. Developing a new legally binding Protocol to the Convention should draw from the extensive legal, military, humanitarian and technical expertise accumulated in the deliberations of over more than a decade.

11. Taking into consideration the urgency of the issue arising from the accelerated development of these technologies, as well as the state of the discussions, the Seventh Review Conference should establish an explicit, clear, time-bound negotiating mandate for a new Protocol under the CCW.

12. Such a mandate should provide for a short and concentrated negotiating process, with clear objectives, an appropriate number of substantive negotiating sessions, and a defined timeframe for the submission of a draft Protocol. We believe that a one-year negotiating process, comprising three sessions amounting to 25 meeting days, would provide an appropriate framework to achieve this objective.

Elements to Ground the Negotiations

13. The most important and urgent issue is to establish the negotiating mandate for the new Protocol, in the understanding that further negotiations are needed to clarify and define its scope, language and objectives.

14. Negotiations on a new Protocol on LAWS should build upon the previous work undertaken by High Contracting Parties, including, but not limited to, the outcomes of the GGE-LAWS, its previous reports, the proposals submitted by States and other relevant elements developed throughout the CCW process.

---

para 25 and sub-para (b) are to be read together, as a single package. Sub-para 25b is based on the effects of the system. When read together, this means that when any system with the mentioned capability is used, [it] is included in the characterization. Furthermore, delegations also sought clarification of the expression "specific group of targets" in the second sentence of paragraph 25(a). Let me record the understanding on which the Group has proceeded: the expression refers to a grouping of targets that the personnel planning, deciding upon, or carrying out the attack have themselves determined. For example, a particular formation that the personnel identified. It's different from "a set of potential targets or characteristics thereof" in the first sentence of the same sub=para. A category or class of targets, within which the system itself determines which objects to identify, select and engage, falls within the first sentence, and accordingly does not exclude a system from this characterization. The two sentences of sub-para(a) are to be read together and consistently. Would any delegation like to take the floor at this stage? " CCW GGE on LAWS, 4 September, 2026, Afternoon plenary session, https://webtv.un.org/en/asset/k1q/k1qd0j39sx

15. Negotiations should be firmly grounded in the Charter of the United Nations and international humanitarian law, while taking into account relevant ethical perspectives and human rights implications. These considerations should guide the development of clear and effective legal obligations aimed at addressing the specific challenges posed by LAWS.

16. Considering the well documented risk of exacerbating unintended bias in data and algorithms, and of automation bias in human–machine interaction a future legally binding document should include provisions to address bias in the algorithms used in autonomous weapons at all stages in their life cycle.

17. Following the two-tier approach developed throughout the GGE-LAWS process, the negotiations should aim at establishing clear prohibitions on certain LAWS and restrictions on the development and use of other LAWS, with a view to ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and addressing humanitarian, legal and ethical risks.

18. Negotiations should provide for provisions that safeguard the centrality of human judgement and control over the use of force and establish clear and effective requirements regarding human control, recognizing that responsibility for decisions concerning the use of force cannot be transferred to machines.

19. Negotiations should address measures to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law from the earliest stages of development, including through legal reviews, testing and evaluation, risk mitigation measures and other relevant safeguards.

20. Negotiations should move beyond the reaffirmation of existing legal principles and seek to translate them into sufficiently clear, specific, and prohibition and restrictions that respond effectively to the distinctive challenges posed by LAWS.

Conclusion

21. The Seventh Review Conference represents a decisive opportunity for High Contracting Parties to demonstrate the capacity of the CCW to respond to emerging humanitarian challenges through the progressive development of international law.

22. After more than a decade of substantive deliberations, the priority should be to move towards the negotiation of clear and effective legally binding rules, rather than prolonging discussions on questions that have already been extensively examined.

23. High Contracting Parties should therefore establish an explicit and time-bound mandate to commence substantive negotiations on a new Protocol to the CCW on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

24. Such a Protocol should establish clear prohibitions and restrictions, preserve human judgement, control and accountability, and provide effective measures for implementation and compliance, with the overarching objective of strengthening the protection afforded by international humanitarian law and preventing and reducing human suffering.

Proposed language for a decision

25. In this regard, the following language for a Decision is suggested for consideration of the High Contracting Parties at the Review Conference:

26. The Seventh Review Conference decides to establish a new open-ended Group of Governmental Experts on lethal autonomous weapon systems, following the conclusion on 4 September 2026 of the work of the Group of Governmental Experts related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapon systems established by Decision 1 of the Fifth Review Conference as contained in document CCW/CONF.V/10.

27. In the context of the objectives and purpose of the Convention, the Group is to negotiate a new Protocol to the Convention on lethal autonomous weapon systems, taking into account the example of existing Protocols within the Convention, and building upon the conclusions and recommendations of the Group of Governmental Experts related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapon systems, in particular the set of elements of an instrument, and other possible measures, adopted by the Group in September 2026, as well as its previous reports, and proposals by High Contracting Parties.

28. International law, in particular the United Nations Charter and international humanitarian law, as well as relevant ethical perspectives should guide the continued work of the Group. The rules of procedure of the Seventh Review Conference shall apply mutatis mutandis to the Group.

29. The Group may convene additional informal meetings devoted to specific issues, and welcome the participation of relevant dedicated experts, such as legal and technical aspects related to the negotiation of a Protocol, as required.

30. The Group shall meet in Geneva in 2027 for 3 dedicated sessions and a total of 25 days. The GGE Chair will be designated by consensus through a written silence procedure.

31. The Group shall submit a report containing a draft Protocol to the Convention on lethal autonomous weapons to the 2027 meeting of High Contracting Parties.

32. The widest possible participation of all High Contracting Parties is to be promoted, in accordance with the goals of the CCW Sponsorship Program.

Geneva, Switzerland, 13 November 2026.