STATEMENT by GREECE
Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS)

Geneva, 25-29 March 2019

Characterization of the systems under consideration in order to promote a common understanding on concepts and characteristics relevant to the objectives and purposes of the Convention

Mr. President,

At the outset please allow me to congratulate you for your appointment as Chairperson of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). Furthermore, we would like to thank you for the planning and the "food-for- thought" paper you have prepared and shared with the delegations well in advance, as well as to assure you of our delegation's full support to your endeavours in leading this meeting to a successful outcome.

The Hellenic Republic fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the EU.

The rapid development of technology and its impact on weapons has improved their capabilities and increased the operational depth of military operations. Furthermore, it has made the weapon systems able to achieve greater accuracy and faster deployment on the battlefield

In that regard, it must be noted that current weapons with high degree of autonomy in their critical functions when used for defensive purposes such as the protection of critical military assets or infrastructures from incoming projectiles have not raised the question of non-compliance with the principles of International Law or any moral concerns, although sometimes they act fully autonomously due to the limited time to eliminate the threat.

However, the increasingly growing autonomy of weapons and the potential incorporation of algorithms with the ability of learning for the development and improvement of their capabilities, as well as for their adaptation to the operational environment have put into question the sufficiency of IHL to address the emerging challenges, especially regarding weapons whose autonomy has not yet been tested on the battlefield, such as the autonomous tanks.

Mr Chair, Dear Colleagues,

The autonomy of a weapon system is the result of the combination of functions that do not require any human intervention. In this context, the weapon systems under consideration should have the following characteristics:

a.   Once launched or deployed their mission cannot be terminated by human intervention,

b.   Have the capability to detect, select and engage military targets without human involvement,

c.   Have the ability to both adapt to its operational environment and select the appropriate action to accomplish its mission through alternatives based on its capabilities, without human intervention.

d.   Have the capacity to learn (machine learning)

 In this regard, it must be stressed that weapon systems specially designed to defend own platforms, forces and populations against highly dynamic threats such as hostile missiles and munitions should not be considered by definition as lethal autonomous weapon systems.

Mr Chair, Dear Colleagues

As we have already outlined, the use of algorithms with the ability of learning in weapons raises concerns which revolve around to their predictability and reliability on the battlefield. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to verify that any weapon with a high degree of autonomy will be tested in all foreseeable scenarios of use during its development stage in order to ensure its compliance with the provisions of IHL and the dictates of human conscience.

In the light of the above, Greece strongly believes that the CCW remains the appropriate forum to continue discussing this issue of LAWS, with a view to further enhancing our common understanding on the multiple legal, ethical, military and technical aspects involved.

Thank you for your attention