Egypt’s views on: “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems”
resolution A/78/241

Fully Autonomous Weapons pose a grave threat to international peace and security and raise several humanitarian, legal and ethical concerns that have to be addressed, in order to ensure the conformity of such weapons with International Law and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), including in particular the cardinal principles of humanity, necessity, proportionality, and distinction.

The United Nations (UN) and its disarmament machinery represent the only effective and inclusive platform to develop the necessary international rules and normative framework, especially that technological developments continue to starkly outpace the necessary regulation at the international level.

Egypt attaches great importance to advancing the efforts of the UM in this regard and strongly supports General Assembly Resolution 78/241 which represents a good first step to foster multilateralism on the issue of Autonomous Weapons Systems and to provide an equal opportunity for all UN members and observers to directly engage on how to address the relevant challenges and concerns.

In the same vein, Egypt welcomes the attention paid to this issue in the policy briefs prepared by the United Nations Secretary-General in the context of the New Agenda for Peace and the Summit of the Future and supports including clear guidance on this important topic in the outcome of the Summit.

Egypt also believes that the second agenda item that is suggested for the United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC) in its 2024-27 cycle represents a good opportunity to put forward agreed principles and practical recommendations towards establishing the necessary normative framework. Focusing on this topic during the current cycle of the UNDC, which represents the deliberative pillar of the UN Disarmament Machinery, would represent an excellent opportunity to take forward the discussions that took place within the framework of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) established under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).
While acknowledging the importance of the relevant discussions within the aforementioned GGE, it is regrettable that progress remains quite minimal, and that no tangible results have been reached yet. This is mainly due to the continued misguided belief by some States that an absolute dominance or advantage in this domain can be maintained, and thereby their resistance to any effort towards the development of rules that would restrict or prohibit the malicious uses of such technologies which are inconsistent with IHL or stop the excessive weaponization of such technologies.

In this regard, Egypt would like to outline the main elements that underpin the Egyptian position on Autonomous Weapons System:

1- First: Egypt is of the view that pursuing a two-tiered approach, comprising the prohibition of fully autonomous weapons while regulating other military applications of AI represents the most realistic and effective course of action.

The rapid development of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems is quite alarming and requires urgent action, including through a legally binding prohibition of fully Autonomous Weapons, as suggested by the UNSG in his proposal for a New Agenda for Peace.

Needless to mention, this prohibition must be based on a clear definition of the term “fully autonomous lethal weapons” to exclusively target weapons that can operate without any meaningful human control or intervention, as well as effective verification.

2- Second: The multiple international initiatives on the development of guidelines and rules for the military applications of AI demonstrate the increasing international awareness of the associated risks. Nevertheless, there is a clear need for streamlining these initiatives and to bring them under the UN umbrella to ensure their inclusivity and effectiveness. Moreover, such initiatives must avoid introducing any arbitrary international oversight mechanisms or imposing any type of discriminatory export controls. Most importantly, such initiatives should not be regarded as a substitute for the objective of concluding a legally binding prohibition on fully autonomous weapons.
3- **Third:** The centrality of the principle of human responsibility cannot be overemphasized. The risks and concerns associated with a weapon that can activate itself, autonomously select and engage its targets, and take a human life without direct human control and supervision are simply unacceptable. Accordingly, Autonomous Weapons Systems must remain under meaningful human control and supervision, to ensure human responsibility and accountability from the perspective of international law, including IHL. Regardless of the type of weapon systems that deliver the force, delegating the decisions to take a human life to machines is unethical and represents a grave violation of IHL.

Even if an algorithm can be programmed to determine what is “legal” under IHL, it can never be programmed to determine what is “ethical”. There is also a need to ensure the responsibility of States for unlawful or wrongful acts caused by their use of Autonomous Weapons.

Moreover, it is necessary to ensure that all software, algorithms, and designs involving the utilization of AI technologies and machine-learning techniques in the military domain remain subject to human revision and the principle of explainability throughout their lifecycle.

4- **Fourth:** Egypt advocates for a balanced and realistic approach, through which we can all continue to benefit from the new opportunities offered by AI applications, while tackling the relevant challenges in a realistic and effective manner. In this regard, we stress the importance of building the capacity of developing countries and bridging the huge gaps in this domain.