1. The development of advanced technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS), is rapidly transforming human life and experience. While the imminent diffusion of emerging technologies could solve many old problems, they could also disrupt political and social order. Because of this, the Philippines believes that international governance structures must thus keep up.

To provide a space to discuss and consider the implications of the use of autonomy in weapons systems from the point of view of the Indo-Pacific region, the Department of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of the Philippines, in cooperation with Nonviolence International Southeast Asia (NiSEA), organized the **Manila Meeting on Indo-Pacific Perspectives on Autonomous Weapons Systems** last 13-14 December 2023.

2. The Philippines believes that there is a need to firm up negotiations towards a robust and future-proof **legally binding instrument** to address the threats of autonomous weapons systems.

3. The Philippines sees the **Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW)** as the appropriate framework to address potential threats arising from autonomous weapon systems, including possible acquisition by armed non-state actors, through a **new protocol** that will include prohibitions and regulations on autonomous weapons systems.

4. Legally binding rules and principles are needed to safeguard against risks and challenges related to the development of AWS, to wit:

   a. **Characterization of AWS.** An exact definition of AWS is not required for the elaboration, development, and negotiation of any normative and operational framework governing AWS. Autonomy exists on a spectrum and purely technical characteristics may alone not be sufficient to characterize AWS in view of rapid evolution in technology. The following working characterization, focusing on the human element and human-machine interaction which are essential to addressing the issue of attribution and responsibility, is a useful starting point:

      “**Autonomous weapon systems**” refers to weapon systems that incorporate autonomy into the critical functions of selecting, targeting, engaging and applying force to targets.

   b. **Prohibitions.** The development, production, possession, acquisition, deployment, transfer or use under any circumstances of AWS if:
i. Its autonomous functions are designed to be used outside the scope of meaningful human control, and;

ii. Its use cannot comply with principles of IHL or the dictates of public conscience including systems that (1) are incapable of distinguishing between civilians, enemy combatants, and combatants hors de combats; (2) are of a nature to cause superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering or are inherently indiscriminate.

c. Regulations. Regulations must be put in place to ensure (1) that meaningful human control is retained in the entire life cycle of any weapon system that incorporates autonomy; (2) that weapon systems do not rely on data sets that can perpetuate or amplify social biases, including gender and racial bias; (3) regulations for due register, tracking, and analysis of AWS are developed; among others.

5. Meaningful human control. For the Philippines, the starting point is that humans must always retain meaningful control over the use of force, and that human targets must never be reduced to mere data for machines and algorithms to interpret. While the displacement of human centrality in the use of force could have legal implications related to accountability, the Philippines' premise transcends legal considerations and arises from the fundamental premise that human dignity is inviolable. In this regard, the Philippines has raised “meaningful human control (MHC)” as the standard with which to assess the development of AWS.

“Meaningful human control” concerns the maintenance of human agency, including the preservation of human judgment and intervention, over the use of force. This includes, inter alia, the following elements:

a. The ability to redefine or modify the weapon system’s objectives or missions or otherwise adapt it to the environment; to deactivate, abort, terminate, or interrupt its operation and use as needed; and to constrain its function to self-initiate;

b. The ability to limit the scope and scale of use of the weapon system, including temporal and spatial limits, and to restrict its targeting parameters and targeting capability; and

c. The ability to understand and explain the weapon system’s functioning with the view to retrospectively providing an explanation that satisfies legal and other requirements regarding the operation of the weapon system, including the attribution of responsibility and accountability.

6. Applicability of international law. The Philippines affirms that international law, including customary international law, the U.N. Charter, the law of state responsibility, international humanitarian law (IHL), international human rights law, and international criminal law are all applicable in the context of the development, use, and transfer of any autonomous weapons systems.
7. **Weapons review.** A crucial implication of the applicability of international law is that states have an obligation to undertake national weapons review. In the study, development, acquisition, or adoption of any new weapon, means or method of warfare, determination must be made whether its employment would, in some or all circumstances, be prohibited by international law.

8. **Ethical considerations.** The Philippines asserts that ethical considerations are central to multilateral conversation regarding AWS and the military application of AI. Beyond legal arguments, states have the duty to ensure the inviolability of human dignity. Any military application of AI must not lead to the relegation of human lives to mere data for machines and algorithms to interpret in the context of the automation of the use of force.

9. **Impact on the environment and ecological integrity.** The presence of autonomous weapons systems raises concerns about environmental vulnerabilities particularly its impact on the marine environment and the ecosystems. It is important to consider maritime and ecological aspects in discussions involving autonomous weapons systems. One example is the belief that autonomous submarine warfare is relatively more desirable due to the low risk of human collateral damage underwater. However, it was pointed out by representatives of Pacific Island States during the Manila Meeting on Indo-Pacific Perspectives on Autonomous Weapons Systems that damage to the marine ecology is directly related to their livelihood.

10. **Other military applications of AI.** The Philippines recognizes that the military application of AI could have benefits particularly in the context of enhancing precision. Such precision could aid military commanders and operators to ensure compliance with IHL. In this regard, the Philippines does not oppose military applications of AI in the context of associated functions related to automation, such as navigation systems, combat management systems, and precision guidance, among others. The Philippines supports voluntary norms of responsible behavior in the context of such AI applications, including weapons review.

11. **Strategic Trade Regulations.** States with strategic trade regulations and members of multilateral export control regimes should work together to agree on a functional definition of LAWS and narrow down possible controls for regulation. This may include emergent technologies that may be a precursor to LAWS, including, but not limited to, military-grade intangible technologies such as algorithms and programs designed to autonomously identify targets for offensive weapons.

States should also consider establishing a clear technical distinction between LAWS and autonomous defense systems (ADS). In particular, defense equipment similar to automatic anti-aircraft and missile defense systems are not LAWS since they only launch interceptors to legitimately engage already approaching hostile aircraft and projectiles. Interceptors and such analogous technologies should be made distinct from munitions launched by offensive systems since they only respond to—but not instigate—armed conflict. Such distinction should enable states to benefit from the protection granted by autonomous systems applied to defense whilst shunning the indiscriminate nature of such systems when deployed for offensive purposes.
The Philippines also submits the Philippine Report on the Manila Meeting on Indo-Pacific Perspectives on Autonomous Weapons Systems as an annex to these inputs.