The Republic of Korea’s Contribution to the Resolution on “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems” (A/RES/78/241)

The Republic of Korea (ROK) recognizes that the rapid development of new and emerging technologies holds great promise for the advancement of human welfare and could, inter alia, help to better protect civilians in conflict in certain circumstances while it is also mindful of the concerns on possible negative consequences and impact of autonomous weapon systems.

In this regard, the ROK places great importance in addressing the issue of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) maintaining a balanced approach between the benefits and risks as well as humanitarian considerations and military necessity when we consider possible ramifications of new and emerging technologies. The views presented below are based on the ROK's working understanding of LAWS as weapon systems that, once activated, will be able to identify, select, and engage targets without further intervention by an operator.

The ROK appreciates the sustained efforts of the High Contracting Parties of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) on these issues. We particularly commend and welcome the valuable work and progress made since the first convening of the session of the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS (LAWS GGE) under the CCW in 2015. The endorsement of the eleven Guiding Principles in 2019 and the inclusion of the two-tier approach in the Report of the 2023 session of the LAWS GGE are important milestones achieved by consensus.

The ROK continues to underscore that the LAWS GGE is and should continue to serve as the central and unique forum to address various issues pertaining to LAWS, focusing on effective implementation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which applies to all weapons systems.
Recognizing the rapid advances in technology, for the furtherance of the discussion in LAWS GGE, the ROK stress that High Contracting Parties’ approach should be practical, realistic, and pragmatic, and based on science. The LAWS GGE work should focus on formulating elements of prohibition and regulation by, inter alia, reaching consensual agreement on what measures would be required to assure compliance with IHL.

In this regard, the ROK affirms that the LAWS which are incapable of being used in accordance with IHL by their nature, such as causing superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering, inherently indiscriminating, or otherwise incapable of being used in accordance with IHL should be prohibited. The calls for a continued discussions on how to regulate the other LAWS in order to ensure full compliance with IHL.

It is important to note, however, that the degree of human involvement is not necessarily a requirement to ensuring compliance with IHL. It would rather be case specific and the principles of distinction, proportionality, and precautions in attack are central when assessing compliance with IHL.

Furthermore, to adequately address potential risks associated with LAWS, the ROK believes that risk mitigation measures to ensure distinction and proportionality in conducting attacks and precautions in attack as well as to ensure accountability will need to be introduced including the provision of training for military personnel, retention of responsible chain of human command and control across the entire life cycle of the weapons systems, and establishment of adequate safeguards measures such as data protection. We also believe that sharing lessons learned on risk mitigation practices as well as information on national frameworks, strategies and policies on LAWS will contribute to this effort. ROK's basic position is well elaborated in the joint working paper CCW/GGE.1/2023/WP.4/Rev.2.

Recognizing various ongoing international initiative, such as the Responsible AI in the Military Domain (REAIM) Summit and the Political Declaration on Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy, the ROK underlines that all relevant international efforts should continue to complement and work synergistically with other initiatives.