



**CCW Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems
Geneva (9 – 13 April 2018)**

**Statement by Ambassador Gianfranco Incarnato
Permanent Representative of Italy to the Conference on Disarmament**

Characterization of LAWS

Mr. Chairman,

Italy believes that moving towards a common understanding on concepts and characteristics of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems with a view to trying to agree on a working definition for the purpose of our debate is at this stage a fundamental step, from which the discussion on other elements will follow.

We acknowledge that this task is not easy, given that we are dealing with a reality in constant and rapid evolution.

Nonetheless, we believe it possible to make some general distinction, by assessing the notion of “autonomy in a weapons system” against the type and degree of human control required or allowed in the use of such a weapon system. Also, autonomy should be put in relation with the type of tasks that are executed by the system and to which it is associated.

It is our view that in order to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law, which continues to apply fully to all weapons systems, including the potential development and use of LAWS, it is paramount that the ultimate decision to use lethal force and to produce lethal effects fully remains in the hands of human beings.

Based on the above, we believe that existing automated weapons systems, governed by prescriptive rules and whose functioning is entirely predictable and intended, are not LAWS. Typically, these weapon systems act on the basis of criteria pre-programmed by human operators. Such criteria determine the rules relating to the type of target, length and geographic scope of operation, and modalities of engagement.

Also, weapons systems with some fully autonomous functions are not LAWS. In this regard, it could be useful to separate weapons themselves from the many other functions that the component technologies might be capable of. Those related technologies very often have a dual-use nature. Thus, due attention has to be paid to the need not to hamper progress in civilian research, development and use of these technologies.

It is Italy's view that existing IHL already provides sufficient parameters to assess the legality of weapon systems. We also believe that weapon systems do not present accountability gap issues, as long as responsibility for their effects can be ascribed to the human operators who decided to field and activate them. Naturally, operators charged with deployment and activation decisions will have to take due account of the environment in which the weapons would operate.

As a consequence, the debate in the current forum should focus on those lethal weapons systems which are fully autonomous. These systems – that do not yet exist, but could possibly be developed in the future – pose problems of compatibility with IHL rules.

A particular attention should be paid to systems with learning capabilities. Assessing the potential for machine learning to further advance autonomy in weapon systems could be a useful element to consider in our discussions on LAWS characterization.

Finally, in Italy's view, it will be important to take into account potential cyber threats and the ways that these could alter the functioning of an autonomous lethal weapons system. Potentially, cyber-attacks could alter LAWS programming also in a way to affect the level of human control.

Thank you.