



**CCW Group of Governmental Experts  
on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems  
Geneva, 25-29 March 2019**

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

**Items 5(b)  
Human element**

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

For Italy, the starting point of this debate has always been that the development, deployment and use of any weapons system, including possible LAWS, must comply with the rules and principles of International Humanitarian Law. In our view, this encompasses the rules on the conduct of hostilities, as well as the obligation to conduct legal reviews of weapons, means and methods of warfare, in accordance with art. 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions.

To ensure such compliance, human control is the critical element meaning that there should be the option to deactivate a launched command and/or the automatic defense response modality of a weapon system. Indeed, autonomous technology in weapon systems must be intended as a support for critical functions of target selection and deployment in the operational theatre, and never as a replacement for human operators in decisions regarding the use of lethal force.

In our view, it would be useful for this Group to further explore, and possibly arrive at a shared definition of the type and level of human control that would be necessary to ensure that the development and use of systems with increasing autonomous functions comply with IHL.

In such a task, the Group could also analyze the difference between “narrow loop” situations – in which one operator is in control of one machine – and “wider loop” situations, in which one operator exercises general control over the activities of several machines (so-called swarms). In both cases, we believe it fundamental to maintain the possibility to modify mission’s objectives or, in emergency situations, (for instance, malfunctions), to abort the mission.

The level of predictability and reliability of a weapon system must be assessed in the phases of testing, verification and certification, given that autonomous functions must be defined ex ante, starting from the stage of requirement, analysis and procurement. Limitations on collateral damage must also be assessed in this context.

Further limitations to autonomous functions may depend on the specific operational environment in which the weapon system is deployed, for which it is critical to define relevant rules of engagement.

Finally, entrusting human operators with the responsibility to activate weapons guarantees the respect of IHL. Even in strictly defensive weapon systems, the decision to activate the operational modality should rely on humans, and complete deactivation should remain possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman