



ICRC

**Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)  
Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems**

**21-25 September 2020, Geneva**

**Statement of the International Committee of the Red Cross**

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) welcomes the efforts of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, as well as the Chair of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, Ljupčo Jivan Gjorgjinski, to make progress in their important work, under difficult circumstances.

The ICRC also appreciates the valuable work done by the outgoing Chair, Ambassador Janis Karklins, in collecting and summarizing commentaries by the High Contracting Parties on the 11 points of agreement, the Guiding Principles adopted at the end of 2019. His paper on commonalities illustrates the substantive common ground shared by States and other stakeholders.

Autonomous weapon systems, as the ICRC understands them, select and apply force to targets without human intervention. To varying degrees, the user of the weapon will know neither the specific target nor the exact timing and location of the attack that will result. This raises serious concerns from a humanitarian, legal and ethical perspective, in particular the risk of losing human control over the use of force.

The ICRC's own commentary on the Guiding Principles focused on three overarching issues:

- International humanitarian law regulates and limits the development and use of autonomous weapon systems in armed conflict.
- Human control is critical to ensuring compliance with applicable international law, including international humanitarian law, as well as ethical acceptability. Specific measures to ensure human control pertain to weapon parameters, the environment of use, and human-machine interaction.
- Internationally agreed limits on autonomous weapon systems are needed, whether in the form of new, legally binding rules, policy standards or best practices, to respond to the pressing humanitarian, legal and ethical concerns raised during deliberations in Geneva over the past seven years. It is clear to the ICRC that it is necessary to establish limits on the types of autonomous weapons used and the situations in which they are used, and these limits can be informed by measures to ensure human control.

It is encouraging that many national submissions and the joint submissions by groups of States stressed similar points, which testifies to a growing convergence of views on these substantive issues. In the ICRC's analysis, there is agreement on: the need to maintain human control, involvement or judgement and the rationale behind that need, including reducing the risk of harm to civilians, upholding legal obligations and ethical principles, and ensuring human responsibility and accountability. There is also a convergence of views on the types of measures that can contribute to ensuring human control, involvement or judgement, which include limits on tasks and target sets or profiles, temporal and spatial restrictions on the operation of the weapon, as well as requirements relating to human situational awareness, and intervention and deactivation capacities.

Significantly, in his paper on commonalities, the Chair finds that further work is required to "determine the type and extent of human involvement or control necessary to ensure compliance with applicable law, notably international humanitarian law, and respond to ethical concerns." In this respect, the ICRC

would also like to draw attention to a joint ICRC-SIPRI report published in June 2020, *Limits on Autonomy in Weapon Systems: Identifying Practical Elements of Human Control*, which sets out five recommendations for a way forward. The ICRC is grateful to the governments of the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland for supporting this independent study.

The ICRC looks forward to engaging in greater depth on these issues during the course of discussions this week.