

## Statement on Agenda 5b (Definition of LAWS)

International Panel on the Regulation of Autonomous Weapons (Twitter: @iPRAW\_org)

Delivered by Anja Dahlmann (Twitter: @adahma) on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020

Thank you Mr. Chair!

On behalf of the *International Panel on the Regulation of Autonomous Weapons*, a group of currently 17 researchers from around the world, I would like to address the debate around a definition of LAWS.

While it is crucial to understand the characteristics, iPRAW recommends regarding the term lethal autonomous weapon systems as shorthand for various weapon platforms as well as systems of systems with machine ‘autonomy’ in the functions required to complete the targeting cycle. This stands in stark contrast to a categorical definition of LAWS.

A categorical definition drawing on technical characteristics in an effort to separate “LAWS” from “non-LAWS” is unable to account for the already existing plethora of systems with autonomous/automated functions and could, as technology progresses further, never be future-proof because almost every conceivable future weapon system can optionally be endowed with various autonomous functions. Even more importantly, in the CCW context a technical definition of a category of weapons would miss the point: while technologies like data-driven computational methods (i.e. artificial intelligence, machine learning) do enable many autonomous functions, the legal, ethical, and operational challenges ascribed to LAWS arise not from particular technologies but from a potential lack of human involvement. Hence, if CCW states parties want to define LAWS, a technology-agnostic conceptualization as presented above, with a focus on ‘autonomous’ machine functions (instead of specific units or platforms) and human-machine-interaction is the most suitable and prudent approach. The ICRC presented a broad notion in this vein already:

“Any weapon system with autonomy in its critical functions—that is, a weapon system that can select (search for, detect, identify, track or select) and attack (use force against, neutralize, damage or destroy) targets without human intervention.”<sup>1</sup>

iPRAW recommends following this train of thought and fleshing it out further, for instance by excluding existing systems like stationary, anti-materiel weapons used solely to defend against incoming munitions.

Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> ICRC (2016), *Views of the International Committee of the Red Cross on Autonomous Weapon Systems*, p. 1.