



Kingdom of the Netherlands

Statement of the Netherlands

delivered by

**H.E. Robbert Gabriëlse, Permanent Representative to the
Conference on Disarmament**

at

Conference on Disarmament

on

**Agenda item 5: New Types of WMD and new systems of
such weapons; radiological weapons**

Geneva, 15 June 2021

Mr President,

My delegation would like to thank you for organising a thematic debate on agenda item 5 of the Conference on Disarmament, namely new types of weapons of mass destruction and new systems of such weapons. This topic continues to evolve, as we witness the development of new and established technologies and their military applications. My country, the Netherlands, follows these developments closely and with a sustained interest. It is therefore key that the CD remains abreast of this topic.

Allow me to thank the panellists for their interesting and comprehensive introductions.

Technologies such as digital and cyber security, artificial intelligence, unmanned aerial vehicles and lethal autonomous weapon systems are relevant to this discussion and I would therefore like to elaborate on these emerging or new technologies.

New technologies potentially add to instability and risk, among others because of their entanglement with the nuclear domain. That counts for hypersonics in relation to means of delivery, but also for AI and Cyber in relation to command and control systems. As a result, emerging technologies have become more of a priority to the Netherlands.

There is great analogy between nuclear and emerging technologies: in both cases we aim to prevent a conflict with major consequences. Together, we must work on describing responsible and irresponsible behaviour, transparency and building trust. I would like to emphasise the importance of **risk reduction, crisis stability and crisis management**. Risk reduction has traditionally been a nuclear domain, but can be extended to the field of emerging technologies. It can form the basis for concrete actions in the area of emerging technologies, such as improving communication channels, promoting transparency and increasing understanding and dialogue about doctrines.

Mr President,

Concerning **cyber security**, we continue to see that both state and non-state actors are increasingly active in the cyber domain. Cyber operations can be conceived as attractive because of the large potential impact that can be realised through only relatively limited resources. The use of offensive cyber capabilities can have a destabilising effect on international relations. The open, free, secure and stable character of the Internet can be negatively affected due to potential proliferation of cyber capabilities, which in turn may have detrimental consequences for economic opportunities arising from increased digitisation.

With the recent consensus reached on the framework of responsible behaviour in cyberspace through the reports of both the OEWG and GGE, we may better be able to respond to the aforementioned risks. These reports give more understanding to agreed voluntary non-binding norms, the applicability of international law to cyberspace as well as to confidence building measures and capacity building. Continuing efforts on the implementation of the agreed framework are needed to reduce the risks of escalation.

Artificial Intelligence, in all its forms and facets, is already profoundly influencing human civilisation and will further change the role of, and relation between, human and machine. The overarching risk related question still is: How can humans continue to exercise meaningful human control over advanced systems with artificial intelligence? A thorough and deepened debate about meaningful human control continues to be necessary in all domains where AI is applied. That debate, and the forthcoming solutions, should not be limited to the operational phase of the AI-systems, but should incorporate already the phases of design, development and testing.

One of the important follow-on questions surrounding the development of new technologies is whether our current legal framework suffices to address any challenges arising from new technologies, such as the deployment of AI in armed conflicts or the fading distinction between dual-use and military goods and the potential impact this has on our export control regimes. Last November the Netherlands organised an expert meeting with international legal experts to seek potential gaps within our regulatory frameworks. The conclusion of these experts was that current international law fully applies to new technologies, incl. AI, and that for now no new legal rules are necessary. However, potential reinterpretation of existing norms will be something to study continuously. The Netherlands has a rich tradition when it comes to feeding the legal debate on non-proliferation, disarmament and weapon export control matters, and is fully committed to continue to do so in our joint effort to keep pace with the fast development of new technologies, like AI.

Mr President,

With regard to **autonomous weapon systems**, the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS has made important steps on the issue of Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems. The Netherlands was a supporter of the establishment of the GGE from the beginning, and is pleased with the development of the 'guiding principles' for the development and the use of LAWS. Unfortunately, the restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic have made it challenging to make further progress on this important matter. Nonetheless, the Netherlands remains fully committed to continue the work on LAWS in the CCW context and is confident that with the combined legal, military and technological expertise more clarity can be given to existing regulatory frameworks.

As set forth by the Belgian chairman of the GGE on LAWS, the Netherlands believes it important that the GGE puts forward concrete recommendations in relation to the clarification, consideration and development of aspects of the normative and operational framework on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS to the High Contracting Parties in the run-up to the 6th CCW Review Conference. The recommendations should, as a minimum, address the application of international humanitarian law (IHL), human responsibility, human-machine interaction and, lastly, weapons reviews. A crucial element for the Netherlands is that humans always retain meaningful human control over autonomous weapon systems.

In that regard, the Netherlands is pleased to announce that a new SIPRI and ICRC study on "identifying limits and the required type and degree of human-machine interaction", which was co-sponsored by the Netherlands, will be presented on 29 June. Hopefully these useful findings will stimulate the debate and help us to find further consensus on this important work area in the run-up to the CCW Review Conference.

Mr President,

The rise of **Unmanned Aerial Vehicles** in the past decade has been extraordinary. A large variety of systems is now being used in an equally varied number of applications, ranging from lightweight drones for recreational use up to sophisticated armed UAVs for defensive and offensive purposes. These developments will continue, enabled by new technologies such as advanced materials and artificial intelligence. The downside of this development, however, is the introduction of new threats and risks that will have an impact on international security. Important issues in this respect include the role of UAVs in and outside armed conflict, the proliferation of UAV technology and the increasing

level of autonomy of UAVs. The Netherlands is committed to engage in international dialogue and initiatives to address these challenges, among others by seeking to achieve effective international agreements, as part of our overall commitment regarding arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation.

Lastly, regarding **biosecurity** the Netherlands is supporting the strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention. Through capacity-building initiatives, peer reviews and awareness raising campaigns, we aim to increase biosecurity and biosafety worldwide. Biotechnological advancements provide opportunities, such as the development of cures for dangerous diseases, but also pose serious threats: biological weapons are increasingly easier to develop in labs. New measures, regulations and guidelines are required in order to prevent malicious actors to gain access to sensitive research, knowledge or data that would enable them to develop such a biological weapon.

Thank you, Mr President.