



Statement by the Permanent Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other
International Organizations in Geneva at the
**2021 Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons
Systems (LAWS) of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons**

**5 (e) Possible options for addressing the humanitarian and international security
challenges posed by emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapon
systems in the context of the objective and purposes of the Convention**

Geneva, 6 August 2021

Mr. Chair,

This Delegation is grateful for the opportunity to share its views on the possible options for addressing the humanitarian and international security challenges presented by emerging technologies in the area of LAWS, in the context of the objective and purpose of the Convention.

Indeed, as the Holy See has stressed before, the challenges presented by LAWS are not limited only to the realm of IHL, but they also raise potential and serious implications for peace and stability. In his address to the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2020, Pope Francis warned that “we are witnessing an erosion of multilateralism, which is all the more serious in light of the development of new forms of military technology, such as lethal autonomous weapons systems which irreversibly alter the nature of warfare, detaching it further from human agency”.¹

Mr. Chair,

This is the eighth year that the issue of LAWS is being discussed within the CCW framework. It is encouraging to see that greater convergence on the characterization of the systems under consideration has been achieved. But it is urgent to translate this common knowledge into practice and take concrete steps forward.

As we know, at the 2019 GGE, we the High Contracting Parties decided that “In its discussion under each agenda item the Group shall consider the legal, technological and military aspects and the interaction between them, and bearing in mind ethical considerations.” While appreciating how A.I. can be placed at the service of the human person and oriented towards the common good, this Delegation deems it of the utmost importance to give such ethical considerations a more prominent role and to retain the fundamental reference to the human person and human dignity at the heart of the discussion.

It is encouraging that throughout the years, there have been valuable contributions in the form of working papers submitted by various High Contracting Parties, the International Committee of the Red Cross and civil society which have addressed the ethical implications of LAWS. In this regard, we support the proposals made by some delegations which emphasize the central role of ethics and the importance

¹ Pope Francis, Video Message to the 75th Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly, available at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200925_videomessaggio-onu.html

of the reference to the human person and to humanity in the discussion. These ethical references are indeed the driving force behind our discussion.

Mr. Chair,

In the preamble of the CCW, as High Contracting Parties we recognized “the importance of pursuing every effort which may contribute to progress towards general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control” and reaffirmed “the need to continue the codification and progressive development of the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict”. The flexibility of the CCW structure, then, already offers appropriate mechanisms for how to proceed, that can be applied to categories of conventional weapons not covered by the existing protocols.

This Delegation believes that to prevent an arms race and the increase of inequalities and instability, it is an imperative duty to act urgently.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.