Statement by the Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation, Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Nonproliferation and Arms Control Vladimir Yermakov at the Sixth Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons on Agenda Item 11 «General exchange of views»

(Geneva, 13 December 2021)

Mr. President,

We congratulate you on your appointment to this position of responsibility and wish you every success in your work. You can count on the support of the Russian delegation in your constructive endeavors. We are convinced that the High Contracting Parties will be able to reach mutually acceptable decisions at the Sixth Review Conference (RC) of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) despite the non-standard working conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues,

The Russian Federation reaffirms its unwavering commitment to its international obligations. We are strictly committed to the existing compliance mechanism for the Convention and its Protocols, including the decision adopted at the 2011 RC and reaffirmed at the 2016 RC to strengthen it. We submit annual reports under the Convention as a whole and Amended Protocol II (AP-2) and Protocol V (P-5) in a timely manner. Our inter-agency delegation takes an active part in all of the activities within the CCW and its Protocols.

The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation make a significant contribution to the implementation of AP-2 and P-5 in terms of demining and clearance of any explosive remnants not only on our territory but also in foreign countries. Examples include Syria, Laos, South Ossetia, and Nagorny Karabakh.
I think there is no need to explain the challenging conditions in which our military has to work.

The Russian Federation remains open to cooperation on humanitarian demining. Since 2014, the Russian Ministry of Defense has conducted activities on the international exchange of military and technical information, as well as international conferences on mine clearance at the International Mine Action Center. We invite interested States and relevant organizations to participate.

Mr. President, distinguished colleagues,

The Review Conference provides every opportunity to undertake a detailed analysis of the operation of the CCW over the past five years and to elaborate and agree on further cooperative actions according to the object and purpose of the Convention.

Strengthening the foundations of the CCW and its five Protocols depends directly on the pace of universalization. In this regard, we call upon States that have not yet done so to accede to the Convention, including all its Protocols. We consider this to be a priority area for our work together.

It is clear that the CCW, like any international mechanism, needs to be improved in response to changes in the world. We have in mind the more effective use of the Convention’s unique disarmament potential on the basis of a balance between humanitarian considerations and the legitimate national security interests of States. This review cycle has demonstrated the fragility of such a balance, and consequently the necessity of maintaining it. From a conceptual perspective, the attempts by some countries and civil society to present – to the detriment of overall interests – humanitarian concerns as an absolute imperative to impose restrictive prohibitions on specific types of conventional weapons seem unconvincing.

Thus, we do not agree with the idea of resuming independent expert work on mines other than anti-personnel mines (MOTAPMs). Our position is that MOTAPMs constitute a legitimate and effective means of national defense.
Attempts to portray their use as a "specific humanitarian risk" are divorced from reality.

We also consider the appeals to introduce issues related to the use of explosive ordnance in densely populated areas to the CCW forum to be untenable. Their resolution lies exclusively in the faithful implementation of existing norms of international humanitarian law, particularly Additional Protocol I of 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 1949.

The issue of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) is still relevant. We support its consideration within AP-2. We look forward to continuing informal work on IEDs in the Group of Experts.

We note the growing interest in the issue of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS) and welcome the results achieved in 2017 – 2021 by the dedicated Group of Governmental Experts (GGE). We reiterate our willingness to continue discussions on LAWS within the GGE as the best forum on the basis of the agreed mandate and agenda. We believe that existing norms of international law are entirely applicable to LAWS and do not need to be adapted to the specifics of these weapons systems.

The Russian Federation, like many other States, is concerned about the situation regarding the financing of activities within the CCW. We call on all countries to fulfill their respective obligations under the Convention and to pay their annual contributions on time and in full. We advocate prioritizing funding for Implementation Support Unit staff contracts. We are open to a substantive discussion of possible ways of improving the financial situation of the Convention.

The Russian Federation reiterates its willingness to engage in meaningful and result-oriented dialogue with all parties concerned.

Thank you.