Mr President,

It is a particular pleasure for me to be able to congratulate you on your election. It goes without saying that you will have the full and active support of my delegation and myself.

I would like to commend you and your team in particular for your effective and transparent leadership through what has been a difficult year. I would also like to thank the Implementation Support Unit, the interpreters and the conference and technical support staff for facilitating this week’s Sixth Review Conference. Following the unusual circumstances that led to the cancellation of the 2020 Meeting of High Contracting Parties, I am pleased that we have been able to proceed with this important Review Conference, despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons remains a fundamental instrument of international humanitarian law. The United Kingdom values the unique nature of the CCW forum – it enables fruitful discussions balancing military necessity and humanitarian considerations, and brings together relevant military, legal and diplomatic expertise.

The United Kingdom remains a staunch supporter of the CCW and its Protocols. We are committed to upholding our obligations under the first four Protocols, and adhere to the spirit of Protocol V and its humanitarian aims. We are undertaking a review to determine whether we can ratify Protocol V.

As conflict evolves, including with the development of new technologies, it remains vital that we secure full and universal compliance with the provisions of International Humanitarian Law. Across a variety of conflict areas we continue to see allegations of the indiscriminate use of weapons covered by the Protocols to this Convention,
including incendiary weapons and improvised explosive devices. Regardless of whether the relevant states are parties to the CCW, the targeting of civilians or the indiscriminate or disproportionate use of force violates International Humanitarian Law. The United Kingdom condemns such attacks and is committed to ensuring that those responsible are held to account.

Mr President,

While we commend the outstanding work of the Chair, Ambassador Pecsteen of Belgium, the United Kingdom was extremely disappointed that the Group of Government Experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems was unable to reach consensus on a set of substantive conclusions and recommendations last week. This was a crucial point in the CCW’s work on LAWS and it was an important opportunity to both reflect the valuable work that this group has done and agree a clear and focused future GGE mandate. This opportunity was missed.

We acknowledge that significant differences between states remain. But that should not stop us working in partnership within the CCW to resolve these issues to meet our shared objectives. We must set favourable conditions to allow the GGE to work effectively towards building norms of use and positive obligations; demonstrating how weapons systems featuring degrees of autonomy can and should be used in accordance with international humanitarian law.

The United Kingdom will continue to be an active participant in UN discussions, working closely with other states and civil society. We continue to regard the GGE as the primary avenue for discussions on LAWS. These discussions must be inclusive, and involve all key actors if they are to be effective. It is the United Kingdom’s hope that we can use this Review Conference to set out a shared understanding of the state of the discussions, and chart a positive and credible way forward within the CCW.

Mr President,

We must renew our efforts to promote this important Convention as a global framework, and we call on those outside the Convention to comply with its humanitarian goals. The universalisation of the Convention is vital to achieving lasting humanitarian benefit. We take this opportunity to encourage states not yet party to accede to the Convention without delay.

I will reserve our substantive comments on finances to agenda item 15. But we wholeheartedly echo your calls for High Contracting Parties to address this fundamental challenge to the effective functioning of our Convention. It remains the case that the full and prompt payment of assessed contributions is a core obligation under the Convention.
In closing, Mr President, the United Kingdom is proud to renew its wholehearted commitment to the full implementation of its Convention obligations. Allow me to assure you of the United Kingdom’s full cooperation and support for the discussions ahead.

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