

Killer robots at UNGA First Committee on Disarmament and International Security

October 2016

In October 2016, 36 countries provided their views on killer robots during the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) First Committee on Disarmament and International Security: Austria, Bangladesh, Botswana, Canada, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Cuba, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lebanon, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States. The extracts follow.

This compares to 32 countries that articulated their views on killer robots at UNGA First Committee in 2015, 23 in 2014, and 16 in 2013. Most countries spoke in the general debate or conventional weapons debate.

For three countries-- Bangladesh, Hungary, and Latvia—this marked the first time they have expressed their views on this challenge. I have updated the [list of 70 countries](#) that have spoken on this topic, including 14 that support the call for a ban.

This year we wanted to hear countries express their support for the [recommendations agreed in April 2016](#) proposing the establishment of a Group of Governmental experts (GGE) to take forward deliberations on ‘lethal autonomous weapons systems’ at the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) in 2017. This decision will be taken by states at the CCW’s Fifth Review Conference in Geneva on 16 December 2016.

As you can see from the following highlights most countries that spoke endorsed the proposed GGE while Russia was the most skeptical, indicating it has “major doubts.” It was disappointing not to hear some key states express their support, such as Canada, Israel, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, UK, and US. Pakistan expressed support for the objective during [our side event briefing](#) on 18 October.

We were also listening for expressions of support for the call for a ban (Cuba, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Pakistan raised this) as well as for retaining human control of weapons systems (Croatia, Cuba, South Africa).

Please do not hesitate to let me know if you have any questions and thanks to our intern Chris Diamond for the following extracts.

Mary

Extracts on killer robots from statements to 2016 UNGA First Committee on Disarmament and International Security

Austria - [October 4, 2016](#)

Another matter of concern for my country is the prospect of the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems. Technological progress is fast and what seems futuristic today may be a reality tomorrow. The challenge is how to ensure that developments remain within ethical, political and legal imperatives. We welcome the broad discussions which were held on the occasion of a series of expert meetings in the framework of the Conventional Weapons Convention. We support the recommendation issued by the latest of those meetings that the forthcoming Review Conference of the Conventional Weapons Convention should **establish a Group of Governmental Experts** to further deepen and intensify international debate on the issue.

Austria - Oct 21, 2016

Mr. Chairman, Before I conclude, let me put on record here one more concern of my country. This is the prospect of development of lethal autonomous weapons systems. With technological innovation moving fast, we risk crossing a very dangerous threshold soon. We should be very careful to make sure that the application of such technologies is consistent with ethical, political and legal imperatives. Therefore, **we are in favour of deepening and intensifying the on-going international debate** about lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Bangladesh - October 21, 2016

The Fifth Review Conference of the CCW in December has the opportunity to advance the dialogue on international legal and regulatory framework on certain advanced convention weapons pursuant to the Convention's objectives and purposes. Bangladesh looks forward to constructive discussions on the recommendations made concerning lethal autonomous weapons system (LAWS) by the informal meeting of experts held in April.

Botswana - [October 21, 2016](#)

Furthermore, recent technological developments such as the use of unmanned air vehicles, drones and autonomous weapons further complicate this matter. While recognizing the strategic and operational requirements for such weaponry, we hold a view that there is a need for serious and sober interrogation on the employment of these. The established body of public international law such as International Humanitarian law amongst others should guide and inform such discourse.

Canada – October 24, 2016

In the context of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, Canada has been active in the discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). We support the consensus recommendations of the April 2016 Meeting of Experts on LAWS. Canada stresses the importance of ongoing engagement with civil society, including academics and other experts, in order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of this complex issue.

China – [October 10, 2016](#)

The process of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation is at a critical historical stage. The nuclear disarmament process is faltering, the authority of the nuclear non-proliferation regime is being undermined, the existing disarmament 2 mechanism is faced with challenges, rules and norms on the emerging strategic frontiers such as outer space, cyberspace and autonomous weapons are yet to be put in place, and the basis for global strategic balance and stability is getting eroded.

China – October 21, 2016

In recent years, the humanitarian problems caused by Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWS) received growing attentions. China supports continued and in-depth discussion on the issue under the appropriate arms control framework, so that countries could gradually deepen understanding, reach consensus, to jointly address the challenges caused by LAWS.

Costa Rica – [October 4, 2016](#)

Las armas autonomas letales pueden poner en entredicho los equilibrios regionales, y afectar los progresos generales alcanzados en la esfera del desarme y la no proliferacion. Somos del criterio que estas armas deberian prohibirse antes de que lleguen a construirse, de la misma forma que se hizo con los laseres cegadores. Por ello, creemos conveniente que la proxima Conferencia de Revision estudie la posibilidad de convocar una reunion de expertos gubernamentales que pueda identificar elementos necesarios para elaborar una convencion internacional.

Costa Rica – October 20, 2016

Costa Rica expects the Fifth Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons address the ethical concerns, legal and technical that they have been raised since 2013 regarding lethal autonomous weapons systems, which are in our view, contrary to international humanitarian law and international law of human rights. Therefore, we will advocate for the next Review Conference will convene an open-ended group of governmental experts to identify the elements necessary to advance an international convention banning this type of new technologies of conventional weapons.

Croatia – [October 21, 2016](#)

Informal discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) have been taking place within the CCW for the last three years". Based on these discussions we now have a better understanding of lethal autonomous weapons systems; yet many unanswered questions remain, including those that raise fundamental ethical, legal, operational, technical and political concerns. For Croatia, a key question is whether these new technologies would be compliant with the rules of IHL, including those of distinction, proportionality, and military necessity, as well as their potential impact on human rights and compliance with International Human Rights

Law (IHRL). The principle of "meaningful human control" is of pivotal importance because we believe that the ultimate responsibility should lie in human hands.

Cuba – [October 20, 2016](#)

In the world, increasingly sophisticated and deadly conventional weapons are produced. There is a marked imbalance in favor of developed countries in terms of production, possession, and trade in these weapons, which threatens stability, international security and peace.

Some states that are leaders in manufacturing, modernization, employment, and development of conventional weapons of high destructive capacity, try to impose regulations to limit and hinder acquisition and employment of other nations for legitimate defense purposes, with certain types of less significant conventional and light weapons.

We support the adoption of a binding instrument prohibiting fully autonomous lethal weapons systems, even before we see them brought into use. Similarly, regulations are necessary for the use of arms that are somewhat autonomous, maintaining the possibility of a human driver intervention.

The development of autonomous systems involving lethal weapons, would at a minimum, pose a serious risk in compliance with the rules and principles of International Humanitarian Law.

Czech Republic – [October 21, 2016](#)

The Czech Republic reiterates its strong support for the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW) that regulates the conduct of armed conflict and thus constitutes an essential part of international humanitarian law. Universality of the CCW and its Protocols remains one of the highest priorities of the Czech Republic. We look forward to the Fifth Review Conference taking place in December this year and believe in progress in discussions and even decisions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) and possibly on Mines other than anti-personnel mines (MOTAPM).

Ecuador – [October 4, 2016](#)

My country also expresses concern at the increasing use and advancement and improvement of the UAVs and gunships as autonomous lethal weapons. The use of these new military technologies brings serious concerns humanitarian, moral and legal order, 10 international community in its various regional and universal forums should continue deepening the implications for international humanitarian law, foreseeing even prohibition of such weapons. We support both work in the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons in this regard and we believe that the regulation only his International trade is not enough.

Finland – [October 21, 2016](#)

The Fifth Review Conference of the CCW will provide an opportunity to continue to address both long standing and newly emerging issues. It is important that the CCW lives up to the developments in the field of conventional arms. Finland strongly supports the recommendations made by the expert group on lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), including, the establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts under the auspices of the CCW.

France – [October 4, 2016](#)

Regarding the CCW, the lively debates on the main subjects on its agenda are encouraging. It is particularly positive to see that the question of lethal autonomous weapons systems, raised by France in 2013, is gradually reaching maturity. [We hope that a group of governmental experts will be created at the December Review Conference to continue discussions on this subject.]

Germany – October 21, 2016

The CCW's work on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) has been extremely useful over the past three years. We would like to see a continuation of our common effort in this area. The next step will be to endorse the informal Group of Expert's recommendations at the Fifth Review Conference. The proposed mandate by the experts captures the complex nature of the problem in its legal, technical and ethical dimension. We think it is possible to arrive at a common understanding and chart a way forward in this ambitious undertaking.

We hope that the recommendations will be formally endorsed by the High Contracting Parties at the Review Conference and that this will lead to the establishment of a formal Group of Governmental Experts in 2017.

Hungary – [October 7, 2016](#)

The CCW is a unique and important tool to assert and enforce the norms of International Humanitarian Law (IHL) in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. The CCW and its Protocols play an important role in responding to challenges posed by new technologies and adapting international disarmament norms to new situations. In this context, Hungary welcomes substantial consideration of the issues of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS) and Mines Other Than Anti-Personnel Mines in the current review cycle, and we support the continuation of these discussions after the Fifth Review Conference this December.

India – [October 20, 2016](#)

The CCW should continue considering ways and means for progressive development of the rules of international law applicable to advanced conventional weapons which have devastating and indiscriminate effects. In this context, we support continued discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) in the CCW, on the basis of the mandate agreed at the Meeting of Experts on LAWS in April, consistent with the objectives and purposes of the Convention. We feel that LAWS should be assessed not just from the view point of their compatibility with

international law including international humanitarian law but also their impact on international security if there is dissemination of such weapon systems.

Ireland – [October 7, 2016](#)

In particular, we are encouraged by the active consideration which has been given to the question of Lethal Autonomous Weapons systems at the CCW and welcome the consensus recommendations which were adopted at the meeting of experts last April. Ireland believes it would now be timely for the Review Conference to **establish a group of Governmental experts** to take this important work forward.

Israel – October 20, 2016

Israel welcomes the work undertaken this year in the CCW and is looking forward to the 5th Review Conference to be held in December 2016. There are some issues that are due to be discussed, such as the IEDs, MOT APM and especially **LAWS which need to be further explored, from both technical and legal aspects**. We believe the Review Conference would be an opportunity to engage in meaningful and substantive discussions and Israel is committed to doing so.

Italy – [October 5, 2016](#)

In the field of conventional weapons, we look forward to the Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to take stock of the work conducted in the past five years, and to lay the basis for our efforts in the next intersessional cycle, particularly as relates to the issues of Improvised Explosive Devices and Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems.

Japan – [October 6, 2016](#)

With the view of the 5th CCW Review Conference to be held this December, having recognized the growing interest of the international community in the issue of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), Japan welcomes the recommendation of the 3rd Informal Meeting of Experts and **supports discussing this issue further** in order to deepen our common understanding on the main elements, including identification of characteristics, elaboration of a working definition of LAWS and application of international law.

Latvia – [October 21, 2016](#)

Latvia remains firmly committed to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its Protocols. We regard CCW as an important forum to increase awareness of the existing challenges and to address emerging issues by gathering competent diplomatic, legal and military expertise. In this regard, **we appreciate continued discussions** on improvised explosive devices and lethal autonomous weapons systems. We hope that at The Fifth Review Conference in December this year we will be able to agree on the next steps to effectively take these discussions further.

Lebanon – [October 5, 2016](#)

With regard to new challenges such as armed drones, autonomous weapons, cyber-security and outer space activities, Lebanon reaffirms the need to regulate the use of such technologies in a universal and inclusive manner based on the principles of Human rights and International Humanitarian Law.

Mexico – [October 20, 2016](#)

With the intention to contribute to the progressive development of international law, Mexico promotes actions within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to discuss the ethical and technical dilemmas of new technologies. Mexico hoped that the Fifth Review Conference (Geneva, December 2016) emanating proposal to allow the CCAC provide shared solutions to major challenges facing the international humanitarian community.

Netherlands – [October 6, 2016](#)

The Netherlands greatly values the important international discussion about autonomous weapon systems. We therefore strongly call for the establishment of an open-ended Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) as next step in these discussions. The increasing availability of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, armed and unarmed, not only to states but also to non-state actors, is of concern to us. Regarding non-state actors, we see an increased risk for UAV proliferation amongst terrorist organisations such as ISIS. The existing international legal framework applies to the use of armed drones. However, it is of utmost importance that existing laws are being upheld and increased transparency is being provided on export and usage. The Netherlands remains committed to an open international dialogue on this matter in order to guarantee transparent and responsible use.

New Zealand – [October 21, 2016](#)

That said, New Zealand retains its support, in principle, for the framework approach of the CCW. We would particularly hope that the outcome of this year's Review Conference will position the Convention to remain relevant and responsive to contemporary concerns, including on the issues of incendiary weapons; Mines Other than Anti-Personnel Mines; and Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). With respect to LAWS in particular we must not allow protracted discussions about the modalities of the process to dictate or limit the substantive progress that is necessary bearing in mind the legal, technical and moral challenges posed by these weapons.

Pakistan – [October 10, 2016](#)

The existing and emerging challenges to arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament need to be tackled collectively on the basis of cooperative multilateralism. The fundamental prerequisites for global security need to be appropriately addressed, including:

..... bringing under appropriate international regulations and prohibitions the development and use of cyber weapons, armed drones and Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS).

Poland – [October 4, 2016](#)

We appreciate the possibility offered by the CCW to address threats resulting from both existing conventional weapons and emerging technologies, such as lethal autonomous weapons systems. In regard to the latter we look appreciatively at progress made so far and hope to see a further formalization of discussion, including through establishment of the Group of Governmental Experts at the CCW Fifth Review Conference.

Portugal – [October 6, 2016](#)

As new challenges emerge, we should consider how the existing disarmament and non-proliferation instruments can be improved. On current and future developments related to the so-called “new era warfare tools”, notably armed drones, fully autonomous weapons, cyberspace offensive use and militarization of outer space, we encourage the continuation of ongoing international work on these subjects, both at political and technical levels. These discussions should take into account, in our view, the need to promote transparency and the applicable international law or, when needed, the establishment of regulatory multilateral security frameworks responsive to the objective of protecting civilians and Human Rights.

Russia – [October 20, 2016](#)

Overall, we support the initiatives to consider on the platform of the CCW questions having to do with the emergence of new types of conventional weapons. At the same time, we believe that this would be beneficial only when we have developed a clear understanding of the subject of discussion. Therefore, we still have major doubts regarding the advisability of establishing a group of government experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. It’s no secret to anybody that the results of the last three rounds of informal discussions on this could not be called encouraging. However, we will be prepared to discuss this and other themes that will be included on the agenda of the two main committees of the review conference.

South Africa – [October 20, 2016](#)

While artificial intelligence and robotics present both challenges and opportunities, we should always be mindful that the possibility to weaponise such technology raises fundamental ethical, legal, operational, and political questions. South Africa believes that the principles of IHL apply to the use of all weapons in any conflict situation, including Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). We support the recommendations to the Review Conference for the convening of a group of governmental experts to discuss LAWS, which would deepen our understanding of the degree of human oversight or control that "autonomous weapons" require.

South Korea – [October 7, 2016](#)

The Republic of Korea also welcomes the recommendations of the global meeting of experts on LAWS... We believe that the CCW framework is the most appropriate to further discuss LAWS,

which is to strike the necessary balances between humanitarian concerns and security requirements.

Sri Lanka – October 24, 2016

In this context, we welcome the on-going discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) under the CCW framework. Sri Lanka particularly welcomes the outcome of the 2016 Meeting of Experts on LAWS, which agreed on a set of recommendations, as per the mandate agreed to at the 2015 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention, which Sri Lanka had the privilege to Chair. We hope that the recommendation for **establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to discuss LAWS** in 2017 would attract a favourable consideration by State Parties at the upcoming 5th Review Conference later this year.

Sweden – [October 4, 2016](#)

Sweden remains firmly committed to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its protocols. Sweden very much appreciates the discussions held on lethal autonomous weapon systems. As States we have an obligation to assess the legality of new weapons. **Sweden will support a decision to create, at the Review Conference, a Group of Governmental Experts** to examine this issue further.

Switzerland – [October 5, 2016](#)

We believe that It is important for the disarmament community to pay particular attention to this issue. We welcome the fact that the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons has actively taken up the issue of lethal autonomous weapons systems, and hope that its next Review Conference will **set up a group of governmental experts** with a strong mandate to advance work in this area. We also deem vital that the monitoring or review of scientific developments be taken up by the various disarmament processes, as is already the case for the CWC. To examine the impact of new technologies on international security and disarmament in greater detail, Switzerland will be holding a side event on 6 October together with UNIDIR, the James Martin Centre and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs.

Turkey – October 11, 2016

We expect that the Fifth Review Conference of CCW in December will consider the discussions we have had in the last five year's cycle and also prepare the basis for the next intersessional cycle, particularly on issues such as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). We welcome the adoption of a political declaration on IEDs.

Turkey, October 24, 2016

We expect that the Fifth Review Conference of CCW in December considers the discussions we have had in the last five year's cycle, and also prepare the basis for the next intersessional cycle, particularly on issues such as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Lethal Autonomous

Weapons Systems (LAWS). We wish to add that we welcome the adoption of a political declaration on IEDs. We support the furthering of the work on LAWS. CCW is the right forum to take up LAWS, as it seeks a balance among humanitarian actions and military utility.

United Kingdom – [October 20, 2016](#)

Just as its aid focuses on repairing the legacy of past conflicts, the United Kingdom is ready and willing to discuss potential future challenges. For that reason the United Kingdom took part in the productive informal meeting of experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems in April this year at the the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). We thank Germany, and Ambassador Biontino in particular, for once again leading discussions; and support the recommendations to the Review Conference. We also thank the ICRC for hosting an experts meeting in March this year, which allowed states to explore further the challenges of increasing autonomy.

United States – [October 20, 2016](#)

Mr. Chairman, the United States is a High Contracting Party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and all of its Protocols. We view the CCW as an important instrument that has been responsible for bringing together States with diverse national security concerns. In 2016, the High Contracting Parties continued important discussions on improvised explosive devices and Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. We look forward to continuing these discussions at the Fifth CCW Review Conference in December.