



Kingdom of the Netherlands

**Statement of the Netherlands**

**delivered by**

**Mr. Reint Vogelaar**

**First Secretary, Permanent Representation of the Kingdom of the  
Netherlands to the Conference on Disarmament**

**at**

**Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS**

**Agenda item 5(c): Review of the potential military  
applications of related technologies in the context of the  
Group's work**

**Geneva, 25 April 2019**

Mr. Chair,

In addition to the statement delivered by the EU and we would like to make some remarks in our national capacity.

Mr. Chair,

Autonomous weapon systems under meaningful human control may have key military advantages. For example, computers often respond faster and more accurately than humans, which may reduce risks to friendly units and the civilian population. These systems are often also able to operate in environments that are dangerous to humans, or difficult to reach. It is therefore to be expected that such weapon systems will be developed around the world over the next few decades and deployed for offensive and defensive tasks.

For many years, the Netherlands' armed forces have been using systems that can, to a large extent, operate automatically and possess a certain degree of autonomy, such as the ship-based Goalkeeper close-in weapon system and Patriot surface-to-air missiles. Given the short time required for engagements, these defensive systems can respond to incoming targets independently, while under meaningful human control. Humans know what type of target will be engaged and can intervene if necessary. These existing weapon systems with autonomous functions operate within a targeting process, within which humans exercise control at various stages in order to ensure compliance with IHL, such as the principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions. Their integration within the military targeting process allows for humans to remain accountable.

The potentially advantageous applications of weapons with autonomous functions in military – but also civilian and industrial – contexts should not be prejudiced. However, the potential challenges that may emerge as a result of increasing autonomy should also be addressed.

In that regard the Netherlands would like to re-emphasize the importance of weapon reviews. The Netherlands considers weapons reviews – mandatory for us under international law – crucial for all weapon systems, including weapon systems with some degree of autonomy.

A better understanding of how weapon reviews work and sharing experiences and best practices will contribute to improve the implementation of weapon reviews for existing systems as well as of near future systems.

In closing, allow me to thank those delegations, in particular Sweden and the United States, that have shared concrete examples of weapon systems with automated or autonomous functions, which contribute to an informed dialogue among High-Contracting Parties.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.