

Sixth Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW)

Australian intervention under 'General Exchange of Views'

Chair,

Australia congratulates you on your election as Chair of this meeting of High Contracting Parties and assures you of our full support. Like others, Australia is pleased that the CCW community can meet in-person once again.

Chair,

Australia is proud to be a State Party to the CCW and its five annexed Protocols. The Convention is an essential instrument of international humanitarian law (IHL) that helps to protect civilians from indiscriminate effects of certain conventional weapons and spare combatants from weapons that cause unnecessary suffering. We are resolutely committed to the Convention's full implementation and universalisation.

Chair,

The CCW has proven itself as a flexible instrument for responding to new developments in weapon technologies. Emerging technologies, such as AI and autonomy, will shape and transform modern warfare. The Convention's inclusive format provides a unique venue for the international community to explore, and where appropriate address, emerging challenges for the implementation of international humanitarian law.

Australia particularly welcomes the productive discussions that have taken place in the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. While the lack of consensus recommendations from the last GGE session is disappointing, we nonetheless greatly value the substantive exchange of views that has taken place in this format. We continue to see scope for constructive discussion and progress on the challenges we all face within this forum. We thank Ambassador Pecsteen for his stewardship of the process, despite the interruptions and challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Australia recognises that IHL fully applies to autonomous weapons systems. This includes the obligation for States parties to Additional Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions to undertake necessary weapons reviews during the study, development and adoption of such

systems. We also recognise that autonomous technologies have the potential to uphold IHL compliance.

Nonetheless, autonomy does raise novel questions about the application of IHL. As such, Australia has advocated for the GGE to work towards an operationally focused tangible outcome, such as a code of conduct or good practice guideline, to further clarify these issues and promote responsible State behaviour in this regard. We look forward to this Review Conference agreeing a clear way forward for the GGE.

Chair,

Australia welcomes the adoption of an Updated Declaration on Improvised Explosive Devices at the Annual Conference of States Parties to Amended Protocol II last week. I thank Ambassador Ogasawara and the IED Coordinators (France and Colombia) for this initiative.

We join others in expressing our profound concern at the indiscriminate use of IEDs and the global impact of IED attacks worldwide, particularly in the perpetration of terrorist attacks.

Addressing this scourge requires a coordinated and multi-pronged international response.

We welcome the enhanced focus on stockpile management to prevent the diversion of precursors, ammunition and components that may be used for the manufacture of IEDs.

Australia is committed to working in partnership with others in this regard. We continue to support a range of activities on Amended Protocol II related matters including in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Syria, Iraq and Sri Lanka.

Chair

Australia is gravely concerned by continued reports of unlawful use of incendiary weapons - including unlawful use of white phosphorus - particularly in Syria. Violations of Protocol III are capable of inflicting an horrific human toll. We urge States to meet their obligations under Protocol III and under general IHL, and we urge States yet to join the Protocol to consider doing so. Australia unequivocally condemns use of incendiary weapons outside these rules.

Chair

In these challenging times, Australia underlines the need for the UN disarmament machinery to operate at its full potential. Accordingly, we champion full and effective participation by both women and men in these forums. We also urge consideration of the gendered impacts of conventional arms use as an integral part of our work, including in the context of the CCW.

Finally Chair,

We join others in expressing concern regarding the ongoing financial situation confronting the CCW and implications for its long-term viability. We thank you Chair for your initiative in proposing concrete solutions to address this issue. Of course, no set of financial measures will remedy non-payment of assessed contributions by some High Contracting Parties. We call on High Contracting Parties to pay their contributions on time and in full, so that the CCW has the means to do its work.