Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

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(Delivered by Ms. Anja Kaspersen, Director of Geneva Branch)

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I am delighted to send my greetings to the 2017 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). I also wish to congratulate Ambassador Matthew Rowland of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on his election as chairperson of the Meeting. I would also like to commend the leadership and serious efforts undertaken by all the other CCW officeholders this year: Ambassador Amandeep Singh Gill of India on Lethal autonomous weapons systems, Ambassador Andre Pung of Estonia on Protocol V Explosive Remnants of War and Ambassador Beatriz Londoño Soto of Colombia on Amended Protocol II on Mines, booby-traps and other devices.

The CCW is a unique instrument of international law. The preamble of the CCW reaffirms the need to continue the codification and progressive development of the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict. The CCW has proven capable at responding to diverse new humanitarian concerns in the field of conventional weapons, including as they relate to new weapons technologies.

This was displayed last week in the first meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS). The increasing automation of the battlefield, the growing separation between the user and subject of deadly force, and the black box dilemmas posed by the underlying technologies raise many issues. These weapons technologies may also raise distinct proliferation and verification challenges.

The GGE explored issues related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention. Importantly, the discussion built upon the work of the three informal meetings of experts on LAWS held from 2014 to 2016. I welcome the decision by the GGE to continue the work on LAWS in the CCW and to move forward with greater focus on the characterization of LAWS and the human-machine interaction.

It is my hope that the discussion you will have at this meeting on relevant developments in the field of science and technology will provide an opportunity to consider how High Contracting Parties can, using the CCW framework, take a systematic, streamlined and coordinated approach to early consideration of relevant scientific research and technological innovations. I also urge High Contracting Parties to consider how they can use the CCW framework to connect with relevant expertise outside governments in these fields.

Harnessing humanitarian concerns to motivate and drive disarmament and arms control achievements has proven to be an effective and powerful tool on repeated occasions, both within the CCW and elsewhere.

I am encouraged by the growing recognition of the need for collective action to address the well documented patterns of harm that result from the use of explosive weapons in populated
areas. It is apparent that specific types of weapons can cause foreseeable and disproportionate or indiscriminate impacts when used in concentrations of civilians. This session has an important opportunity to advance multilateral deliberations on how the development of new measures could enhance the protection of civilians, ensure greater compliance with international humanitarian law and advance our broader common objectives in the field of disarmament.

Through his 2017 report to the Security Council on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the Secretary-General has called upon parties to conflict to ratify or accede to core international instruments aimed at protecting civilians, including the Arms Trade Treaty and similar regional instruments. In addition to existing international instruments, it is crucial that further multilateral deliberations on the development of new norms, principles and guidelines are explored, including in this forum, to enhance the protection of civilians.

I welcome ongoing work to address the challenges caused by the increasing use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The impact of IEDs spans a wide array of policy areas, inter alia socio-economic development, including the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, freedom of movement, counter-terrorism strategies and broader questions of the security and stability of States. In this regard, their cross-cutting implications can complicate coordinated, multilateral strategies to address IED threats.

In this context, I commend the work undertaken by the Amended Protocol II Group of Experts, in particular as Amended Protocol II is the only international instrument to explicitly reference IEDs. This year’s focus on information exchange on national measures and best practices on the general features of IEDs, including new types of IED; methods of humanitarian clearance of IED; and methods to protect civilians from IED will continue to enhance our understanding of the problem. Discussions in this framework, including exploration of existing guidelines, best practices and recommendations to address diversion and illicit use of precursor materials, have demonstrated the value of ongoing coordination.

I urge the High Contracting Parties to continue to explore avenues for reducing the impact of anti-personnel landmines, mines other than anti-personnel mines and explosive remnants of war, all of which have the potential to inflict harm upon civilians, impede the delivery of humanitarian aid and undermine development.

On Protocol V, I welcome the focus of this year’s work on the practical implementation of Article 4 on Recording, retaining and transmission of information, which can have a significant impact on the clearance of ERW and ultimately the protection of civilians. I remain concerned at ongoing reports of the use of incendiary weapons. It will be important that High Contracting Parties review Protocol III and ensure that in light of the developments of these weapons and the conduct of armed conflicts, it remains fit for purpose.

The United Nations is steadfast in its support for the implementation of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. But we cannot ignore the financial shortcomings outlined in
the note verbale shared with all Regional Groups last week. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the work done by Ambassador Matthew Rowland of the United Kingdom and lend my support to the proposals in front of this Meeting of High Contracting Parties to restore the financial resilience of the Convention. Though no measure will yield immediate results, it is very encouraging to note the efforts by the High Contracting Parties to work together to resolve these issues comprehensively and sustainably to ensure we do not face a situation again in which budgetary considerations delay the essential, ultimately life-saving, work of this body.

Please accept my best wishes for a successful meeting.