Remarks by the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs to the opening of the 2018 Meeting of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons

Delivered by

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Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to deliver remarks, on behalf of the High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, to the 2018 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

I congratulate Ambassador Jānis Kārkliņš of Latvia on his election as Chair of the Meeting.

I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the leadership of all the CCW officeholders for 2018: Ambassador Alice Guitton and her successor, Ambassador Yann Hwang of France, on Amended Protocol II on mines, booby-traps and other devices; Ambassador Mouayed Saleh of Iraq on Protocol V on explosive remnants of war; and Ambassador Amandeep Singh Gill of India on emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Contemporary armed conflicts are increasingly complex and urban. The foreseeable result is the massive loss of civilian life and the destruction of civilian infrastructure. Armed conflicts are once again becoming deadlier for civilians, and the annual number of civilian casualties attributed to armed conflict is at its highest levels in many decades. These impacts are well documented.

Our controls over the lethal use of force have struggled to keep pace. While most of the armed conflicts the world has seen over the past two decades have been internal, armed forces continue to fight them with major conventional weapons designed for use against competing armies on traditional battlefields. Many of these weapons are inherently indiscriminate when used in populated areas. As armed conflict has moved from open fields and into villages, towns and cities, the humanitarian impact has been devastating.

At the same time, developments in science and technology are enabling, at an accelerating pace, the design and acquisition of new weapon technologies with unclear or potential dangerous applications. These could bring various foreseeable risks, problems such as unclear attribution, resulting in unwarranted armed responses and escalation.
For these reasons, this Convention and its objectives have never been more important. As a framework agreement, the CCW has served as a flexible platform for the progressive elaboration of limits on the means and methods of warfare, in accordance with international humanitarian law. The value and relevance of the CCW is not only reflected in the specific restrictions contained in its protocols. It is also reflected in the ability of the High Contracting Parties to pursue timely and dynamic discussions on new weapons.

The United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs is proud to have supported States in these endeavours and remains committed to the implementation and further elaboration of the Convention.

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Last month, we launched the implementation plan for the Secretary-General’s disarmament agenda, *Securing Our Common Future*. Disarmament that saves lives is central to his agenda. The leading components of this part seeks to mitigate the impact of conventional weapons on civilians. Many of the related actions are geared toward facilitating various emerging issues under discussion within the framework of this Convention. I will touch upon a few of these.

The Secretary-General has placed particular importance on addressing the possible impacts of new technologies on international peace, security and stability.

At the 2018 Web Summit in Lisbon, he said that the existence and use of autonomous weapons with the discretion and capacity to take human lives is politically unacceptable, morally repugnant and should be banned by international law.

That is why in his disarmament agenda, the Secretary-General committed to support the efforts of States to elaborate new measures to ensure that human remain at all times in control over the use of force.

In this connection, we welcome the progress made this year within the Group of Governmental Experts, including the recommendation of ten possible guiding principles on emerging technologies in the area of **lethal autonomous weapons systems**. I encourage you to build on this work in 2019 and to achieve a common understanding on characteristics, as well as on agreed limitations, that should be applied to autonomy in weapons.
The discussions around autonomous weapons have raised general concerns that new weapons are increasingly challenging existing norms, including international humanitarian law. For this reason, the Office for Disarmament Affairs will be working with its partners to facilitate the exchange of information and experiences between States on the reviews of new weapons.

We believe that conducting such reviews is a practical measure that all States can take to ensure their armed forces comply with international law. Increased transparency in these reviews would help to build confidence in how States fulfil this responsibility, ensuring predictability with respect to the potential introduction of destabilizing new technologies and promoting common understanding regarding the application of international law, particularly international humanitarian law.

In the context of other emerging issues in the context of the objectives and purposes of the Convention, we welcome the various and complementary initiatives relating to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

Through high-level engagement, the Secretary-General will facilitate the development of new international limitations, common standards and operational policies to protect civilians from the impacts of armed conflict. Various United Nations and other entities are also committed to raising awareness on these impacts and to facilitating the sharing of policies and practices designed to better protect civilians.

Turning briefly to the more established issues under consideration, we very much welcome the efforts undertaken in the framework of Amended Protocol II to address the increasing proliferation of improvised explosive devices.

As their improvisational nature often renders them inaccurate and erratic, such devices pose a serious threat to communities, humanitarian workers and United Nations staff and peacekeepers. The humanitarian impact and indiscriminate effects of these devices compels particular urgency in countering this threat.

I am, therefore, encouraged by the efforts of High Contracting Parties to share information on methods of clearance, risk education and national measures to fight unlawful use.

We continue to be disturbed by reports of civilian harm due to use of incendiary weapons, including in scenarios where the application of Protocol III may be unclear or insufficient robust. I therefore welcome the inclusion of this issue on your agenda. I encourage you to make us of this opportunity to undertake a thorough review of the impact of incendiary weapons and how the effective implementation or further elaboration of the Convention could mitigate harm to civilians.
Finally, I support your continuing work on mines other than antipersonnel mines. I hope your discussions lead to the identification of specific, technical measures that could mitigate the humanitarian impact these can cause.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

The CCW must be protected and further enhanced as a vital component of the disarmament toolbox and the overarching international peace and security architecture. However, for it to function properly, it must rest on sound financial footing. I therefore commend the efforts by Ambassador Janis Karklins to put forward some concrete suggestions to ensure effective and sustainable support for the Convention.

My office has been involved in these efforts from the outset. I have personally suggested measures to ensure sustained, dedicated and sound support and to strengthen the operational continuity of the CCW activities and meetings.

Allow me therefore to take this opportunity to recall two guiding principles established by the General Assembly, which I hope will inform the deliberations to follow on how to address the financial shortcomings. First, I wish to recall that extra-budgetary activities cannot result in any financial liability for the Organization. Second, High Contracting Parties must pay their amounts assessed for the agreed yearly activities on time and in full in order to be assured of the availability of meeting and support services.

We stand ready to support any decision the High Contracting Parties will take to ensure the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the Convention. As many related functions within the international peace and security architecture have become fragmented in recent decades, we sincerely hope that the path you choose will also strengthen the ability of the United Nations to support the pursuit of humanitarian disarmament in all its aspects.

In closing, I wish to assure you that the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs is fully committed to the fundamental mission of the CCW and to its full and effective implementation.

Best wishes for a very successful meeting.

Thank you.