

**SIDE EVENT – First Committee / UNGA78**  
**State positions, weapons systems and technological trends**  
**18/10/2023 – 13.15 – 14.45**  
**CR 9, United Nations building, New York**

Ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I'm pleased to welcome you to this side-event organized by Belgium with Pax and Automated Decision Research and dedicated to the issue of autonomous weapons systems.

The question of the inclusion of autonomous features in weapons systems raise a lot of legal, ethical and humanitarian questions as well as security concerns about the future conduct of warfare. Since the topic of autonomous weapons systems was discussed informally in the CCW in 2014, then formally from 2017 thanks to the creation of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems, Belgium has been participating actively in these debates.

Belgium submitted several working papers on autonomy in weapons systems in national capacity and as well as a co-penholder with other countries, especially to attempt to characterize those autonomous weapons systems.

Belgium also fueled the discussions on the Guiding Principles affirmed by the GGE with the inclusion of the principle of human-machine interaction which states that human-machine interaction should ensure that the potential use of autonomous weapons systems is in compliance with applicable international law, in particular international humanitarian law.

Moreover, Belgium also submitted contributions to operationalize the guiding principles.

Since 2021 and the Belgian presidency of the GGE, Belgium has been advocating for the so-called two-tier approach to address the challenges posed by the autonomous weapons systems according to which some autonomous systems should be prohibited, and others, should be regulated.

The progress in the GGE has been slow but this two-tier approach seems to be the most promising avenue to engage further on the topic of autonomous weapons systems. The joint statement delivered at the first committee last year by Austria in the name of 70 States, including Belgium, also acknowledges this notion.

At the last session of the GGE in May this year, Belgium has clearly voiced the need to start negotiating a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons systems.

During this session of the first committee, we are part of a cross-regional group of 11 countries led by Austria which present a resolution on autonomous weapons systems.

We hope that this resolution will have a positive impact on the substance and the process on further debates on autonomous weapons systems with the aim at adopting a legally binding instrument, as it has been recently recommended by the United Nations Secretary General in his *New Agenda for Peace*.

Now that the debate on autonomy in weapons systems in the GGE is enriched by the contributions of different forums, such as the conferences held in the Netherlands, Costa Rica, Luxembourg, Trinidad-and-Tobago and the upcoming ones in the United Kingdom, the Philippines and the Republic of Korea, the launch of the Monitor on States positions on autonomous weapons systems of Automated Decision Research is extremely timely.

So, without further a due, I'll give the floor to Dr. Catherine Connolly, Research manager of ADR, who will introduce the speakers. I also take the opportunity to thank PAX for co-organizing this side-event.