

**SPECIAL MEETING ON TOPICS OF CURRENT INTEREST
IN INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW**

(April 29, 2021)

Intervention by Canada

- Canada is pleased to participate in this discussion on the issue of autonomous weapons systems.
- In particular, we are deeply concerned about the potential for systems that are **fully** autonomous and, therefore, lack appropriate human involvement. War must remain, at its root, a human enterprise, and the development or use of fully autonomous weapons systems would therefore be unacceptable.
- Canada is committing to work with international partners to address the challenges of fully autonomous weapons systems. We are committed to maintaining appropriate human involvement in the use of military capability which can exert force.
- Canada believes that any legal discussion about autonomous weapons should centre on urging better compliance with existing International Humanitarian Law, including the obligation for States to ensure the lawfulness of their weapons, means and methods of warfare.
- This position is coherent with the first of the eleven guiding principles that the CCW Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems has adopted, namely that:
 - “International humanitarian law continues to apply fully to all weapons systems, including the potential development and use of lethal autonomous weapons systems;”
- Under international humanitarian law (IHL), at least two distinct aspects need to be analyzed: whether the weapon itself is lawful and whether the use of the weapons system during hostilities might be prohibited. IHL applies to any weapons system regardless of complexity.
- This guiding principle is operationalized for Canada through our national legal review of all weapons systems, including those with some autonomous functions, as well as our strict adherence to IHL throughout the lifecycle of a weapon including development, training, and use.
- Canada believes that **fully** autonomous weapons systems (those lacking appropriate human involvement) could not be used in a manner compliant with IHL.
- Today’s discussion is another useful opportunity to reaffirm the applicability of IHL to all weapons systems, including those with autonomous functions, and to advance international compliance with IHL.
- Thank you.