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Statement of the Holy See at the Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW) (Geneva, 13 November 2014)

Here below the Statement by H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva at the Meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW) (Geneva, 13 November 2014):

Statement of H.E. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi

Mr. President,

First of all, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency and for the preparatory work to make this meeting as productive as possible.

Mr. President,

In the context of this annual meeting of the CCW, I would like to raise several important issues that the CCW, it seems to me, should consider.

First, I thank the French Presidency for the excellent work that has enabled the informal meeting of last May to conclude the work on the lethal autonomous weapons systems. It is a matter of great importance to my delegation and it is larger than the scope of the CCW where our primary interest is the development and respect for international humanitarian law. The automation of war and therefore the risk of its dehumanization should prompt States parties toward a deeper reflection and eventually to a decision to enact the indispensable measures that are necessary. A consideration merely from the military viewpoint would be artificially reductive. A global approach is indispensable: scientific, legal, cultural, economic, ethical, and humanitarian. The Holy See stated its position on this question at the informal meeting. I will not repeat it now. But I would like only to reaffirm our wish that the mandate regarding this topic be renewed taking into account the importance of preserving an official trace of the statements, documents, debates and discussions.

Mr. President,

The **second question** I would raise is the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Today we witness numerous conflicts, an overwhelming majority of which unfolds in urban areas. With growing urbanization of the world population, the tendency of urban wars will increase. How to protect the civilian populations? What should we do to safeguard civil infrastructures, indispensable for the livelihood of large communities? Is the current international humanitarian law sufficient? If not, how do we complete it and adapt it? What is certain, from the observations and data presently available, is that civilian populations are the first victims of conflicts. In many cases, they have no protection: millions of refugees and displaced people, a majority of them civilian victims, a great number are women and children; total or partial destruction of numerous urban centers; total disorganization of social, academic, economic and political life; the exacerbation of hatred and of feelings of revenge that makes the reestablishment of peace and national reconstruction more difficult, if not impossible. It seems to me that an essential question touches all States parties: Does the CCW have something to say and do in such a situation? For the credibility and the integrity of the Convention and for the respect of the numerous victims, I would like to suggest to put this question on the agenda of the CCW.

Mr. President,

The third and last question that I would like to raise is that of the use of armed drones. The Holy See has intervened in the meeting of 2013 dedicating its statement exclusively to the topic of armed drones. The fact of having adopted a mandate regarding the lethal autonomous weapons systems does not dispense the CCW from discussing in an appropriate manner the complex question of use of armed drones. We are witnessing a certain proliferation of this technology and a growing use of it in various conflicts. The challenges are multiple and related to international humanitarian law, to human rights, and to international law. The ethical implications are not insignificant. The choice of indifference in relation to this question is counter-productive. The fact of not addressing problems at the right moment can have disastrous consequences and make them almost insoluble, as experience in other domains teaches us. There is still time for the CCW to become interested in drones before they become an additional source of greater destabilization when the international community needs more than ever stability, cooperation and peace.

I thank you Mr. President.

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