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**Statement by Ms. C. Mélanie Regimbal, Chief, UNODA Geneva
at the 29th session of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee**

Tuesday, 21 February 2023

15:00 – 17:00 hrs.

Palais des Nations, Room XX

Members of the Advisory Committee,

Distinguished participants,

Good afternoon. On behalf of the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs – UNODA – it is my pleasure to address the 29th session of the Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Council during its consideration of the item on “Human rights implications of new and emerging technologies in the military domain.” I would like to share with you a brief overview of the work and views of UNODA in this area, and to offer our support in your work ahead in implementing Council resolution 51/22.

The UN Office for Disarmament Affairs supports multilateral efforts aimed at achieving the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. As part of this, the Office works to address the humanitarian impact, on both civilians and combatants, of major conventional weapons and emerging weapon technologies. With humanitarian disarmament at the center of its efforts, UNODA thus supports States and the international community in their endeavors to prevent, diminish or eliminate the harm caused to human beings through the use of certain weapons or weapon types.

In recent years, UNODA has been engaged in promoting the understanding of the foreseeable risks and challenges of developments in science and technology and their impact on disarmament. This has included supporting the Secretary-General in his efforts to encourage responsible innovation of science and technology to ensure its application for peaceful purposes, and supporting the efforts of Member States to elaborate new measures, including through political or legally binding arrangements, to ensure that humans remain at all times in control over the use of force.

Since 2016, in the framework of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions of the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects – also known as the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons – States have been examining the possible challenges posed by emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems – commonly referred to as “LAWS”. In particular, the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS, for which UNODA serves as Secretariat, has been mandated to consider proposals and elaborate, by consensus, possible measures and other options related to the normative and operational framework on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS.

Though the Group has made notable substantive and normative contributions on this topic, including by adopting, in 2019, eleven Guiding Principles on LAWS, concrete and decisive progress to prohibit and regulate lethal autonomous weapons systems at the international level is still lacking. The Secretary-General has taken a strong stance on the issue and emphasized that machines with the power and discretion to take lives without human involvement are politically unacceptable, morally repugnant and should be prohibited by international law.

In this context, UNODA welcomes the adoption by the Human Rights Council of resolution 51/22 and its acknowledgement that international human rights law and international humanitarian law are complementary, and that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing. As recently emphasized by the UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, autonomous weapon systems is not strictly a security issue solely linked to the disarmament area – as the adoption of Council resolution 51/22 shows. The consideration by the Council of this issue, and the study that the Advisory Committee will undertake on the human rights implications of new and emerging technologies in the military domain can contribute to further unpacking issues related to LAWS and broader military applications of artificial intelligence, both to create synergies and to examine links between disarmament, human rights and development approaches, and to holistically consider gaps in multilateral governance.

In view of the rapid advancement of new and emerging technologies in the military domain, both the Secretary-General and the High Representative have also underscored that now, more than ever, it is crucial for the international community to come together, to seek alignment and to urgently agree on a pathway leading to an effective international instrument on LAWS, negotiated under the aegis of the UN. This should be based on the prohibition of autonomous weapon systems that cannot be used in compliance with international humanitarian law, and the regulation of other types of autonomous weapon systems.

UNODA therefore stands ready to assist the Advisory Committee in carrying out its mandate to prepare a study examining the human rights implications of new and emerging technologies in the military domain, while taking into account ongoing discussions within the United Nations system. It will do so by providing information on the work and progress of the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS, which

will meet twice in 2023 – first from 6 to 10 March and then from 15 to 19 May. In addition, UNODA will be pleased to offer information on the significance of a human-centred approach to disarmament and how it contributes to safeguarding human rights while compelling States to comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

Thank you.
