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Dear Mr Donaldson,

Thank you for your letter of 9 April 2018 to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP on 'ethical AI' and Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). This has been passed to me for reply.

Firstly, let me assure you that we, too, recognise new technologies can pose concerns and challenges, as well as opportunities, and we take this issue very seriously. The UK believes existing International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is the appropriate legal framework for the assessment and use of all weapons systems, including autonomous systems, in armed conflict. The UK undertakes a large range of control measures at all phases of a weapons development and deployment. This starts with research and development, testing and evaluation; through to the conduct of legal weapons reviews, the use of standard operating procedures and rules of engagement, and intensive training to ensure commanders and operators are informed and empowered to use equipment in accordance with legal and ethical obligations. We encourage other states to follow our example.

The UK's position on the use of lethal force is that there must always be human oversight and authority in the decision to strike. Human control does not begin and end at the selection and engagement of a target, rather it is reiterated and reinforced at numerous junctures, including auditable trails and accountable procedures. Human control and IHL is key to addressing international security and humanitarian concerns raised by emerging technologies in the area of LAWS.

As you note, the UK does not intend to develop lethal systems that could select and engage targets without any human control. The UK articulated this commitment once again at the meeting of the LAWS Group of Government Experts (GGE), held under the auspices of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, from 9-13 April 2018. We are fully supportive of the GGE discussions on LAWS which seek to develop understanding on the characterisation of possible LAWS and the details of human control, and welcome the fact that this active forum brings together experts from

diplomatic and military spheres, as well as from academia, industry and civil society. I can reassure you that the UK is, and will remain, engaged in all aspects of the LAWS debate as reflected by the range of legal, technical, ethical and military experts who again joined our delegation to the GGE meeting.

I hope you find this reply useful.

Yours sincerely,

*Annabel Jenkin*

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