QUAKERS
Canadian Friends Service Committee

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The Honourable Anita Anand, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Global Affairs Canada
125 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2

Re: The Seventh Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and a legally binding protocol on lethal autonomous weapons systems

Dear Minister Anand,

We write on behalf of the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC), the peace and social justice agency of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada, as the Seventh Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) concludes in Geneva. We join the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) in urging Canada to support the majority of States calling for a time-bound mandate to negotiate a legally binding Protocol on lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). As QUNO stated to the Conference on November 17th, *the world is at "an enormously consequential legal, moral and technological inflection point."* After over ten years of work in the CCW, the Group of Governmental Experts adopted by consensus in September a set of elements for an instrument, including the first agreed characterization of these systems. The basis for negotiations is in place. Approximately 130 States now support a legally binding instrument. What remains is the political will to proceed.

Friends' peace testimony leads us to oppose all war and preparations for war, regardless of whether a weapon is guided by a human or an algorithm. When CFSC joined the interfaith call for a pre-emptive ban on fully autonomous weapons in 2014, we stated this clearly, and we reaffirm it now. Regulating these systems does not make war acceptable; it is a necessary line for humanity. Quakers are guided by a deep conviction in the inherent worth and dignity of every person. We cannot accept machines deciding who lives and who dies. Delegating the taking of human life to sensors and software undermines human dignity, creates an accountability gap that cannot be closed, and lowers the threshold for the use of force.

These concerns are immediate. Weapons with increasing autonomy are already being tested and used in armed conflict. As our partners at Project Ploughshares have documented, affordable drones, open-source software, and dual-use technology are spreading these capabilities faster than diplomacy can respond. We also share QUNO's view that the challenge is not only technical or legal, but also ethical. Ethics cannot be separated from the law governing weapons and the conduct of hostilities.

Canada is well positioned to lead. In 2019, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was directed to "advance international efforts to ban the development and use of fully autonomous weapons systems." In its submission under UN General Assembly resolution 78/241, Canada stated its opposition to fully autonomous weapons systems and affirmed that "humans – not machines – are responsible for the use of force." Canada's contributions to the Group of Governmental Experts, including work on algorithmic bias, are valued. The Ottawa Treaty on landmines shows that when consensus stalls, principled States can still create new law to protect civilians. We urge the Government to translate these commitments into clear leadership now.

In support of QUNO's position, we respectfully ask that Canada:

1. **Support a clear, time-bound negotiating mandate.** Canada should back a mandate to negotiate a legally binding Protocol that builds on the agreed set of elements, with negotiations concluded by the end of 2027. It should resist proposals for further years of non-binding discussion.

2. **Seek strong prohibitions and regulations.** The Protocol should prohibit autonomous weapons systems that target human beings and those that cannot be used under meaningful human control, and it should strictly regulate all others.

3. **Keep ethics at the table.** Canada should ensure that ethical considerations guide future work, including by supporting the participation of ethics experts alongside legal, military and technical experts.

4. **Not let consensus become a veto.** Quakers value the search for unity, but consensus is not an end in

itself. It must serve, not obstruct, the humanitarian purposes for which the Convention was established. As QUNO's recent analysis shows, when a few States strategically withhold consent, others' good-faith concessions steadily ratchet the outcome toward the position of the least willing to compromise. We urge Canada to align with like-minded States on the red lines beyond which compromise would yield an unacceptable outcome.

5. Make the majority visible. When one or a few States block agreement, the record shows only that the CCW did not reach consensus, which conceals the broad support for regulation. Canada should state its position clearly on the record and join cross-regional statements supporting negotiations.

6. Defend inclusive participation. This Conference opened by attempting to confine civil society and observers to a single session. Canada should insist that civil society, academia and observer States take full part in all future work.

7. Be ready to act beyond the CCW. If a strong mandate cannot be agreed, Canada should join States committed to human dignity and human control over the use of force in pursuing a legally binding instrument through other avenues, including the UN General Assembly.

This week, QUNO reminded delegates of the young people watching from the public gallery, whose future these decisions will shape. History holds many missed opportunities that were regretted in hindsight. Canada can help ensure that this is not one of them.

We welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your officials to discuss Canada's position and next steps. We hold this work, and all who advance it, in the Light.

In peace,



Jennifer Preston, General Secretary
on behalf of Canadian Friends Service Committee (Quakers)

cc: Prime Minister's Office, Minister of National Defence; Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Canada to the Conference on Disarmament; House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development; Quaker United Nations Office