



**Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN
Geneva**

**Statement by Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador Zaman
Mehdi at the Plenary Meeting of the Conference on Disarmament
25 May 2023**

**(Thematic discussion on Agenda Item 5 – New types of weapons of mass
destruction and new systems of such weapons; radiological weapons)**

Madam President,

Thank you for convening this plenary meeting.

This item has been on CD's agenda since its first session in 1979.

The conversations on this subject date even further back to the 1960s and 70s. This included UNGA discussions on military applications of laser technology and radiological warfare among others. It was also established that as technology evolved, further issues would have to be examined under this item.

The 1978 SSOD-I Final Document, also recognized this aspect in extensive detail and I quote *“In order to help prevent a qualitative arms race and so that scientific and technological achievements may ultimately be used solely for peaceful purposes, effective measures should be taken to avoid the danger and prevent the emergence of new types of weapons of mass destruction based on new scientific principles and achievements. Efforts should be appropriately pursued aiming at the prohibition of such new types and new systems of weapons of mass destruction. Specific agreements could be concluded on particular types of new weapons of mass destruction which may be identified. This question should be kept under continuing review.”* Unquote.

The SSOD-I also underscored that “*a convention should be concluded prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling and use of radiological weapons*”.

During the 1980s a subsidiary body on radiological weapons considered the matter but no consensus emerged. From 1993 to 2018 no subsidiary body was reestablished on this item.

Madam President,

Despite the inertia under this item, the world out there still moved ahead. The link between technology, innovation and weapon systems was further reinforced, as means and methods of warfare evolved, and humanity discovered new ways of killing.

Even as we grapple with questions surrounding new domains of war fighting such as cyber, outer space and electromagnetic spectrum, added layers of complexity arise due to the integration of technology with traditional domains. We cannot afford to remain stuck in old binaries.

The unprecedented and breakneck pace of developments and emergence of new technologies has highlighted the urgency for applying an arms control lens.

Even as the age of new weapons technologies has inevitably arrived, it is essential to develop associated norms, laws and rules to regulate development, deployment and use of these technologies. We can only risk ignoring the normative dimension of such systems at our own peril.

In this context, we believe that this agenda item has assumed greater significance and can not be ignored any further.

Madam President,

While we rightly focus on the impact of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) on international security, it is important to recognize that the serious threats to peace, security and stability at the regional and global levels by new technology weapons are comparable to any category of WMDs.

This aspect has been well established as evidenced in the security policies and doctrines of states, some drawing explicit links of new weapons with nuclear weapons while others do so implicitly.

For example, take Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (LAWS), on which a Group of Governmental Experts under the framework of CCW concluded its work last week.

A large number of states have been highlighting the legal, ethical and humanitarian dimensions of LAWS, as well as its serious implications for the regional and global peace and security. At the same time, we also hear arguments on the “usability” of such weapons. Focusing on brighter aspects of AI based weapon systems in absence of a normative framework calls for caution. By moving ahead with development, deployment and use of AI in weapon systems without ensuring predictability, reliability, explainability and traceability, and an appropriate legal normative framework, we run the risk of contributing to instability and unintended escalation. Establishing a taboo need not wait for a tragedy.

While it may eliminate the danger of human casualties for the user states, it results in the increased propensity of use and enhanced prospects of symmetric and asymmetric responses, thus lowering the threshold for application of force and armed conflict. In times of crisis, this would be highly destabilizing.

In addition, the conversation on the integration of Artificial Intelligence with other domains for warfighting purposes is long over-due.

However, progress in the CCW framework has been modest at best and too narrow in scope.

We believe that time has come for the CD to address the grave challenges to international security resulting from the development, possession and potential use of LAWS in a comprehensive manner.

Madam President,

Cyber space has also emerged as one of the key domains of modern warfare. The ability to act anonymously, without traditional geographical limitations, at a very low risk to human life, coupled with the ability to mass produce cyber weapons cheaply, makes this option extremely attractive and yet dangerous.

Several States are developing ICTs as instruments of warfare. A multilateral response including international cooperation and assistance is therefore essential to reduce risks and secure the cyber space.

Madam President,

We also see value in addressing the threat of chemical and biological terrorism through further normative development that plugs the gaps in the existing international legal regime.

It is well known that chemical and biological materials are relatively more easily available and therefore there are greater risks of these being acquired, developed and used by non-state actors. A Convention dealing with terrorist acts involving chemical and biological materials will be a positive development on the international security and counter-terrorism landscape.

We support the commencement of substantive work in the CD on this subject.

Other new types of weapons, such as directed energy weapons are also in need of a similar focus.

Madam President,

In conclusion, the CD cannot remain oblivious to these ongoing developments and must deliberate and negotiate normative frameworks relating to these new weapon systems and technologies.

States seeking to perpetuate perceived strategic advantages and maintaining their full spectrum dominance have continued to avoid taking up these issues in an earnest manner. Such an approach only perpetuates the CD's deadlock and needs revisiting, sooner than later.

I thank you.
