



**Delegation of Italy to
the Conference on Disarmament
Geneva**

**Conference on Disarmament
Item 6, “Comprehensive Programme of Disarmament”**

Thematic Debate on the challenges of new and emerging threats: assessing the impact of emerging technologies on international security and arms control efforts

**Statement by Ambassador Leonardo Bencini
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Mister President,

We thank you for organising this debate on an issue of growing relevance for the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation agenda. I would also like to thank the panel for raising some of the most pressing issues concerning military applications of AI.

The work we conduct here has always been an attempt – sometimes very successful, other times less so – at bridging the normative gap between the political and diplomatic realities of a given period and the technological and scientific breakthroughs occurring during that same period. This was the case for all major treaties that had to regulate certain aspects of the use of new technologies. Think of nuclear energy and the NPT, biotechnology and the BWC, outer space exploration and the Outer Space Treaty. The challenge has always been that of keeping up with technological and scientific advancements that are intrinsically faster than any diplomatic process. As the UN Secretary General pointed out “technological advances are moving faster than our ability to respond – or even comprehend – them”.

Harnessing the benefits and addressing the challenges of AI will be at the heart of the work of the diplomatic community for years to come, as will be the development of adequate governance.

Italy was glad to be part of a cross-regional group of co-sponsors of the resolution on AI adopted by consensus earlier this year, on 21 March, by the United Nations General Assembly. It is the first, ground-breaking resolution on artificial intelligence (AI), recognising that safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems have the potential to accelerate progress towards the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), protect human rights and promote peace. The same resolution also highlights that the improper or malicious design, development and use of these systems pose risks that may hinder sustainable development, widen digital divides and undercut the protection and promotion of human rights.

Italy expresses appreciation for the work of the High-level Advisory Board on Artificial Intelligence and for its Interim Report which clearly identifies principles to guide the new global AI governance. We also support complementary regional processes within the European Union, UNESCO and the OECD. As President of the G7 this year, Italy has recognized artificial intelligence as a central pillar of the G7's agenda. The upcoming G7 summit in Puglia from 13 to 15 June will continue to center on AI as a cross-cutting theme.

In the statement of the G7 Non-proliferation Directors (NPDG) Group, we recognized the profound impact of emerging technologies such as AI on arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. This challenge requires to foster the debate on the responsible military use of these technologies ensuring compliance with international law, especially international humanitarian law, promoting responsible behavior and, where necessary, developing new norms and measures. In Italy's view, the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) is particularly suited to hold discussions on the development of a legal instrument that addresses emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons system (LAWS) and that clearly sets prohibitions and regulations on the basis of the so called "two-tier approach". We are committed to advance discussions on the development of elements of a future instrument on LAWS, to be eventually adopted as an Additional Protocol to the CCW. On 25 May, we submitted a paper as our contribution to the UN Secretary General's forthcoming report on LAWS.

Italy looks with interest at other recent initiatives in this field such as the one launched by the Netherlands and the Republic of Korea on Responsible AI in the Military Domain Summits (REAIM). We look forward to the REAIM Summit in Seoul next September. Italy has endorsed the Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy launched by the United States. The Declaration provides a framework to build international consensus around States' responsible behaviour in developing deploying and using military AI, including through the exchange of best practices and building States capacities.

We look with interest at recent research conducted on the impact of emerging technologies on the whole CBRN spectrum. Regarding nuclear non-proliferation, this shows how big data and machine learning could support early detection and deterrence. Current research on blockchain and potential use of cryptography, conducted within the framework of the International Partnership on Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV), may support nuclear disarmament verification processes. However, we share the concerns of many in relation to AI and nuclear command and control. The unpredictability of certain algorithms could affect decision making and activate a chain of events with potentially catastrophic consequences.

Also on the biological side, the convergence of AI and machine learning with high-quality biotechnology and biochemistry has a promising future for biomedical research, supporting drug discovery and advancing medical diagnostics. On the other hand, possible unintended biosecurity and biosafety risks need to be carefully addressed.

Italy pays special attention to these issues within the BWC and looks forward to continuing the discussion within the ad hoc Working Group. In particular, we look forward to the establishment of an advisory mechanism on science and technology, as mandated by the IX BWC Review Conference, possibly by 2025. In our view, such a body should be able to provide valuable scientific and technological advice also on the relationship between AI on one hand and biosecurity and biosafety on the other.

Thank you for your attention.

