

NEW PROTOCOL: LASER WEAPONS

ISSUE: Sweden has proposed a new Protocol to the Convention which would prohibit the use of laser weapons.

BACKGROUND:

The Swedish/Dutch proposal (supported by the ICRC) would prohibit the use of laser weapons that could cause blindness. The UK/French proposal would prohibit the use [and production] of only those laser weapons specifically designed to cause permanent blindness. The Chairman's Rolling text contains both options and also includes a provision stating that blinding as an incidental or collateral effect of the legitimate employment of laser weapons is not covered by the prohibitions.

CANADIAN POSITION:

We are concerned that the discussion on this issue must not be permitted to distract the Review Conference from considering the major issues related to scope, verification and transfers. If it looks like it will delay other matters, we would prefer to defer discussion of this issue until the next Review Conference.

If the question cannot be deferred, we would support the UK/French proposal as it best reflects the Canadian approach.

POSITIONS OF OTHER MAJOR PLAYERS/GROUPS ON THE ISSUE:

During previous negotiations, the US stated that it would prefer not to have the protocol. However, it appears that they fully believe that this issue will be raised by the Germans. If so, the US would support the UK/French proposal.

The Chinese are developing blinding laser weapons to be sold and would presumably be against the inclusion of this protocol.

LIKELY AREAS OF COMPROMISE:

At this time, it would appear that a likely area of compromise would be to ban those weapons specifically designed to blind, though not those weapons that would do it incidentally.