



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

4 May 2015

Ambassador Michael Biontino
Permanent Representative of Germany to the Conference on Disarmament
28c, Chemin du Petit-Saconnex
CH-1209 Geneva
SWITZERLAND

Via email: l-cd@genf.auswaertiges-amt.de

Dear Ambassador Biontino,

I am writing on behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots to express our sincerest appreciation to you for chairing the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) meeting of experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems at the United Nations (UN) in Geneva on 13-17 April 2015. We are grateful to the team that assisted you, including the members from the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR).

Our global coalition of non-governmental organizations appreciates, in particular, your efforts to encourage delegations to prepare to contribute substantively at this meeting, including by providing information on their national policy on autonomous weapons. This resulted in substantively contributions from a number of states, which combined with the contributions by UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and campaign representatives, made for the richest and deepest deliberations on this topic to date.

We also wish to thank you and your team for the work that went into assembling the expert presenters for the meeting and especially for ensuring that women were able to contribute this year. We hope that the same commitment to diversity and to ensuring gender equality occurs in all future CCW meetings.

We could not help but be disappointed however by the emphasis that a handful of states including Germany placed at the 2015 CCW experts meeting to focusing future work on transparency measures and the national-level weapons reviews required by article 36 of Additional Protocol I (1977) of the Geneva Conventions. These actions alone are not nearly enough to deal with the multiple challenges posed by autonomous weapons. As the ICRC [observed](#), efforts to encourage implementation of national legal reviews are no substitute for CCW states to consider possible options at the international level to address the legal and ethical limits to autonomy in weapon systems. As the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC) [noted](#) “more transparent discussion of how current semi-autonomous weapons systems, automated defense

systems, and remotely-operated weapons systems are kept under meaningful human control” could be helpful, but “transparency is not on its own a sufficient means to regulate autonomous weapons.”

We would like to detail our expectations for the road ahead at the CCW on fully autonomous weapons.

After two years of informal meetings of experts, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots believes it is now time for states to commit to a more formal CCW process aimed at achieving a concrete outcome. At the 2015 CCW experts meeting, no state objected to continuing deliberations on this topic and most that spoke—including Germany—explicitly called for the establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on autonomous weapons systems at CCW’s annual meeting in November 2015.

An open-ended Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) has been the established method of work for CCW deliberations over the past two decades on concerns ranging from landmines to explosive remnants of war to cluster munitions. Based upon long-standing precedent the GGE would be open to all interested states regardless of whether they have joined the framework convention and its five protocols as well as to NGO representatives. Key documents would be translated into the official UN languages. A GGE would therefore facilitate and advance the broadest possible participation by all states, including developing nations, as China and others have requested.

A Group of Governmental Experts could dedicate more time to meet in 2016. At least three or four weeks of deliberations would allow for more substantive, in-depth analysis of key issues, of which “meaningful human control” should be at the center.

Most importantly, a Group of Governmental Experts would create an expectation of a concrete outcome, and not just allow for further informal discussions. It would help pave the way for a decision by states at their Fifth CCW Review Conference in late 2016 to adopt a negotiating mandate aimed at swiftly achieving a new Protocol VI to address the concerns raised over autonomous weapons systems.

We urge you to consider the ICRC’s call at future CCW meetings for states to “address where the limits should lie, in order to ensure that that meaningful, adequate and effective human control is maintained over weapon systems.” Our campaign proposed that the concept of “meaningful human control” be built in across the agenda of the 2015 meeting as a cross-cutting issue to be addressed by every session. While this did not prove possible yet, delegations at the meeting continued to return to the notion on human control indicating its central relevance to the deliberations.

We encourage Germany and all nations to be ambitious and act with a sense of urgency when it comes to dealing with the multiple challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems. Creating a new CCW protocol on autonomous weapons could be the most far-reaching achievement of the CCW ever, with the greatest positive impact on the protection of civilians, on how future wars are waged, and on the way in which we think about our collective humanity.

We will be back in Geneva during the week of 22 June and if you are available would welcome the opportunity to meet to discuss the 2015 CCW meeting and follow-up.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Wareham', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mary Wareham
Coordinator, Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Human Rights Watch
1630 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 500
Washington DC 20009
Tel. +1 (646) 203-8292 (mobile)
wareham@hrw.org

CC: Hine-Wai Loose, CCW Implementation Support Unit, HLOOSE@unog.ch