



# CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

## Statement to the UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security

New York  
12 October 2016

By Erin Hunt, Mines Action Canada  
On behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Thank you Mr. Chair.

In the view of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, the many serious ethical, legal, military, proliferation, security, and other concerns raised by fully autonomous weapons pose such a threat to our humanity that a preemptive ban is warranted. We note the appeal for these questions to be “thoroughly deliberated and examined” that Indonesia has made here on behalf of the [Non-Aligned Movement](#) (NAM).

Retaining human control over use of force is a moral imperative and essential to promote compliance with international law, and provide for accountability.

We have spent three weeks over the past three years at the Convention on Conventional Weapons or “CCW” in Geneva discussing lethal autonomous weapons systems together with states, UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and other actors. This process has raised even more questions and the expectation that states will move forward with their work and deliver results.

Our global coalition of non-governmental organizations believes that implementing the recommendation to establish an open-ended Group of Governmental Experts on lethal autonomous weapons systems would give states an outcome at the CCW’s Fifth Review Conference in December 2016 that shows forward progress. In order to maximize that progress, the GGE should meet for a total of four weeks during 2017.

Such Groups of Governmental Experts have been the established method of work for CCW deliberations over the past two decades. Based on that long-standing precedent, these GGEs have been open to all interested states as well as to NGO representatives. Key documents can be translated into the official UN languages. A GGE would therefore help to enable the broadest possible participation.

During the general debate of this 71<sup>st</sup> session of the UNGA First Committee on Disarmament, at least 17 states expressed support for the process to address autonomous

weapons concerns at the CCW, including chair Algeria, as well as NAM and the [European Union](#) (EU).<sup>1</sup> Last month more than 30 states endorsed the GGE objective at a key preparatory meeting for the CCW's Fifth Review Conference.

Our movement has heard national expressions of support for further work on fully autonomous weapons through its outreach. This year alone, campaign representatives have visited London, the Hague, Moscow, Oslo, Ottawa, Tokyo, Washington DC, Wellington, and other capitals to engage with government officials and speak with various audiences on the rationale for a preemptive ban. We continue to pick-up new supporters and build momentum.

In our outreach, it has become clear that only one country is reluctant to create a Group of Governmental Experts, in part due to concern that such a move could increase expectations of an outcome that cannot be achieved. We seek bold results and not endless, inconclusive deliberations. Advancing to the next level would provide the public with hope that nations are serious about dealing with the concerns raised by these weapons in a timely manner.

We sometimes hear that we don't know what we're talking about when it comes to defining autonomous weapons systems. Yet definitions are always agreed during the very final stage of negotiations and not from the outset. First, the goal of the instrument—to ban or restrict—must be established and then the specific legal definition determined on the basis of the agreed-upon goal.

Moreover, a general concept of fully autonomous weapons is all that is needed at this stage, and that concept is clear to us. We are talking about future weapons systems that once initiated will be able to operate without meaningful human control. They will be able to select and engage targets on their own, rather than requiring a human to make targeting and kill decisions for each individual attack.

We have all benefitted from the dedicated efforts of Ambassador Michael Biontino of Germany as chair of the 2015 and 2016 CCW meetings on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

It's clear that there is strong interest and appetite among states for continuing their deliberations on autonomous weapons, but the CCW does not have to be the only multilateral venue to do so.

As the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions shows, there is a particularly important role for the Human Rights Council to play on this emerging international issue of concern.

We look forward to continued cooperation in our work to ban fully autonomous weapons.

Thank you.

---

<sup>1</sup> [Austria](#), [China](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Ecuador](#), [France](#), Germany, [Hungary](#), [Ireland](#), [Italy](#), [Japan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Netherlands](#), [Pakistan](#), [Poland](#), [Portugal](#), [Sweden](#), and [Switzerland](#).