



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

Time for More Serious Action on Killer Robots

Decision on the Way Forward Due 13 November

(New York, 20 October 2015) – After two years of multilateral talks on questions relating to ‘lethal autonomous weapons systems’ it’s time for countries to agree to a more formal process that has the ultimate objective of creating of new international law on the weapons, said the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots today. The aim should be to establish the principle of meaningful human control over targeting and attack decisions to ensure these critical functions are never delegated to machines.

“We’re increasingly concerned that the informal UN talks on autonomous weapons are aiming too low and going too slow,” said Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch, who coordinates the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. “Rapid developments in technology are racing ahead of diplomacy. Governments need to take concrete steps aimed at negotiations on a preemptive ban on autonomous weapons.”

Several robotic systems with various degrees of autonomy and lethality are currently in use by high-tech militaries including the US, UK, China, Russia, South Korea, and Israel. Without new constraints this trend will result in weapons systems that would give full autonomy to machines.

These and other nations are participating in the annual session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) First Committee on Disarmament and International Security in New York this month. Nations are not expected to take any formal decisions on autonomous weapons at this month-long meeting, but for the third year in a row many are using the opportunity to express their views on the matter in their statements. The committee is an important venue to indicate if states wish to continue and expand their autonomous weapons talks at the next annual meeting of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) in Geneva on 13 November.

Thus far at the 2015 session of UNGA First Committee, Austria, China, France, Germany, Ireland, Lebanon, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland have raised autonomous weapons in their statements, as well as the Non-Aligned Movement and the Nordic countries. Most have recommended that deliberations continue in 2016.

Austria has proposed that CCW states agree to establish a formal Group of Governmental Experts or “GGE” to deepen and intensify ongoing international debate. The Netherlands also called for a GGE to further deliberations and “deepen our understanding of what we exactly mean by ‘meaningful human control’ when we talk about these weapon systems.”

“We fundamentally object to weapons that operate without meaningful human control as it is morally unacceptable to cede the decision to take a human life to a machine,” said Ms. Miriam Struyk of Dutch peace organization PAX, a co-founder of the

Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. “Decisions to use violent force against a human being must always be taken by a human being.”

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots supports any action to urgently address autonomous weapons in any forum, including the Convention on Conventional Weapons, where a 1995 protocol banning blinding lasers provides a pertinent example of a weapon that was preemptively banned before it was ever fielded or used.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots calls on all nations to establish and articulate their policy on autonomous weapons and to start working urgently to legislate a preemptive ban through an international treaty, as well as through national laws and other measures.

This month marks three years since a small group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) met in New York and agreed to establish the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots to work for a preemptive ban on weapons that would select and attack targets without further human intervention. Since then it has grown into a global coalition of more than 55 NGOs.

Calls to prohibit fully autonomous weapons have been made by:

- The governments of Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Pakistan, State of Palestine, and the Holy See. Additionally, Croatia, Ireland, Sri Lanka, and others nations have said that the call for a ban must be considered;
- 21 Nobel Peace laureates including the former presidents of Poland, Costa Rica, South Africa, and Timor-Leste;
- More than 70 faith leaders of various denominations;
- Approximately 2,800 artificial intelligence and robotics experts;
- The private Canadian company Clearpath Robotics;
- The European Parliament, which adopted a resolution in 2014 calling for a ban on “the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons which enable strikes to be carried out without human intervention.”

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots seeks to provide a coordinated civil society response to the many ethical, legal, technical, and other challenges raised by autonomous weapons. It is led by a Steering Committee of five international non-governmental organizations—Human Rights Watch, International Committee for Robot Arms Control, Nobel Women’s Initiative, Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs, and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom—and four national NGOs that work internationally: Article 36 (UK), Association for Aid and Relief Japan, Mines Action Canada, and PAX (The Netherlands).

Campaign representatives and their special guest, renowned artificial intelligence expert Professor Toby Walsh will provide a briefing for United Nations General Assembly delegates in New York on Tuesday, 20 October 2015. Campaigners are also meeting with government representatives and top UN officials to solicit support for a more substantive diplomatic process on autonomous weapons.

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