



## **CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS**

**Presentation to the  
UN Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters**  
Agenda item 'Disarmament and security implications of emerging technologies'

United Nations, Geneva  
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Delivered by Maya Brehm, Article 36

I am pleased to speak on behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, the international coalition of non-governmental organizations launched in April last year. My organization, Article 36, is a co-founder of the Campaign and a member of its Steering Committee.

The Campaign welcomes the continuing consideration of autonomous weapons systems by the Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters in the context of its discussions on the disarmament and security implications of emerging technologies.

We are grateful to again have the opportunity to present our views on this topic, and to discuss with the Board the concerns raised by weapons systems that could select and attack targets without meaningful human control.

I would first like to provide a brief assessment from the perspective of the Campaign of international policy developments over the last year, and then offer a few suggestions for policy discussions going forward.

In his report of November 2013 (S/2013/689), on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the UN Secretary-General drew attention to concerns raised as to the ability of autonomous weapons systems 'to operate in accordance with international humanitarian and human rights law'. He also posed important questions as to the moral acceptability of delegating 'decisions about the use of lethal force to such systems' and deploying systems if legal responsibility cannot be determined as required by international law.

The Campaign shares these concerns and urges the UN Secretary-General's full support for the Campaign's call for a preemptive ban on the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons.

In May 2014, States Parties to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) held a four-day meeting of experts on 'lethal autonomous weapons systems', the first multilateral meeting ever held on this topic at the international level.

The Campaign was pleased by the depth and breadth of states' interventions during the meeting. There was considerable discussion over the viability of existing international law in adequately meeting the challenges posed by fully autonomous weapons systems, and over the desirability of a ban or moratorium or restrictions to supplement existing law and best practices. During the meeting no state said they were pursuing the development of fully autonomous weapons. No state vigorously defended or argued for such weapons although the Czech Republic and Israel each spoke on the desirability of such systems.

The debate demonstrated in our view that there is great concern with the prospect of future weapons that, once activated, would select and engage targets without meaningful human control. It also showed recognition of the need to confront the challenges posed by such autonomous weapons systems. Clearly, there is appetite for continuing this work in 2015. But whether discussions in the CCW will continue next year will depend on whether states can reach a consensus decision in November.

Concerns raised by autonomous weapons systems have also been discussed in the Human Rights Council. In his report presented to the Human Rights Council in May 2013, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns, detailed the moral, ethical, legal, operational, technical, and other concerns raised by fully autonomous weapons. Since then, much of the debate over autonomous weapons systems has focused on the weapons' potential role in armed conflict, raising questions over compliance with international humanitarian law.

But these weapons could also undermine fundamental principles of human rights law. The Campaign welcomes the 2014 report (A/HRC/26/36) by the UN Special Rapporteur, which draws attention to the 'far-reaching potential implications' of fully autonomous weapons for human rights, specifically the rights to life and dignity.

The Campaign endorses – as an interim measure – the Special Rapporteur's call for national moratoria on the testing, production, assembly, transfer, acquisition, deployment, and use of autonomous weapons, and supports his recommendation that the Human Rights Council 'remain seized' with the matter of autonomous weapons systems and 'make its voice heard as the international debate unfolds'. During the debate in the Human Rights Council last month, several states supported this recommendation and indicated their willingness to address the matter in more than one forum.

Multilateral policy debates, as they take place in the CCW and in the HRC, are supported by other meetings and events organized by academic institutions, civil society and international bodies. Expert meetings convened by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), for example, have contributed to furthering a better and more broadly shared understanding of the issues in hand.

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Going forward, for the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots the objective is clear: a comprehensive, pre-emptive ban on fully autonomous weapons, to ensure there is always meaningful human control over targeting and attack decisions. Such a prohibition

should be achieved through an international treaty as well as through national laws and other measures.

We welcome the UN Secretary-General's call for discussions on autonomous weapons systems to 'be inclusive and allow for full engagement by United Nations actors, ICRC and civil society'. Inclusiveness and breadth of perspectives has a number of concrete policy implications in our view:

It is crucial that fully autonomous weapons are discussed in a variety of fora and not only in the Convention on Conventional Weapons. The issue must remain on the agenda of the Human Rights Council to ensure that the human rights perspective is given due consideration.

Further discussions of autonomous weapons systems must continue to engage a broad range of actors presenting a diversity of views, including sociologists, philosophers, human rights lawyers, humanitarian and military professionals, law enforcement officers, and roboticists, representing governments as well as civil society and international bodies.

Greater efforts must be made to ensure that a diversity of gender and regional identities are represented in the emerging debate on autonomous weapons systems. The Campaign has in particular criticized the expert panels at the CCW experts meeting for including no female experts. Excluding the voices of women and other gender identities from global policymaking efforts on peace and security, in our view, runs counter to UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

With regard to discussions in the framework of the CCW, the Campaign urges countries to advance the issue by agreeing to a mandate in November that creates a more formalized exchange and by allocating more time – four weeks, rather than four days – to addressing the many concerns that have been raised with these future weapons systems.

It is important not to lose momentum. Neither a 'wait-and-see' attitude, nor drawn-out informal discussions can constitute an effective response to the risks posed by the development of increasingly autonomous weapons systems. Effective preventive measures can and must be taken. At the CCW experts meeting in May, five countries called for a ban on fully autonomous weapons.

The Campaign notes the interest shown at the CCW meeting of experts in discussing weapons reviews under Article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Convention. An open discussion on how states discharge their obligations to review compliance of new weapons with international law could help address the lack of transparency surrounding current state practice.

However, national weapons reviews do not constitute a sufficient response to the risks posed by fully autonomous weapons systems and they imply that development of such weapons is acceptable. As presently conducted by states, weapons reviews are not proving to be a strong barrier against the development of weapons that later turn out to cause unacceptable humanitarian harm.

A clear norm under international law is required to ensure that any use of violent force be initiated only by human decision, after careful human consideration, and that meaningful human control is exercised over every individual attack.

The imperative of maintaining meaningful human control over targeting and attack decisions emerged as the primary point of common ground at the CCW experts meeting. Most nations that spoke highlighted the importance of maintaining meaningful human control over targeting and attack decisions, including Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland, and the UK.

Structuring the debate on autonomous weapons systems around the notion of 'meaningful/adequate/appropriate human control' helps identify the parameters around which control is exercised in present practice over the independent operation of weapons and weapons systems.

Understanding when and where and within what limits we deem it acceptable today that certain weapons act without direct human intervention (such as in the case of a certain mines, missiles, or sensor-fused munitions) provides indications of the temporal, spatial, context-, and effects-related boundaries beyond which human control is no longer meaningfully exercised over target identification, selection, and engagement.

In order to take this work forward in multilateral fora, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots urges all states to develop national policy on fully autonomous weapons in consultation with relevant actors, including civil society.

Both national and international policy development will benefit from continued expert work, particularly cross-disciplinary discussions, providing in-depth analysis of the issues raised by increasingly autonomous weapons systems.

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To conclude, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is pleased to see that states have started multilateral policy discussions on autonomous weapons systems - the beginning of a process that should lead to new international law in the form of a preemptive ban on fully autonomous weapons.

Thank you.

## **Additional background information**

The **Campaign to Stop Killer Robots**, launched in April 2013, is an international coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working to ban fully autonomous weapons.

The campaign is led by a **Steering Committee** comprised of five international NGOs and four national NGOs that work internationally:

Article 36

Association for Aid and Relief Japan

Human Rights Watch

International Committee for Robot Arms Control

Mines Action Canada

Nobel Women's Initiative

PAX (formerly IKV Pax Christi)

Pugwash Conferences on Science & World Affairs

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Human Rights Watch coordinates the campaign. For more information, contact the **Coordinator**, Mary Wareham at Human Rights Watch: [wareham@hrw.org](mailto:wareham@hrw.org) or visit the campaign website <http://www.stopkillerrobots.org/>