



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

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

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AS DELIVERED

I am pleased to address you on behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, the international coalition of non-governmental organizations formed two years ago that is working to preemptively ban weapons that would select and attack targets without further human intervention.

We have many concerns with these fully autonomous weapons, but perhaps our most significant concern is with the notion of permitting a machine to take a human life on the battlefield or in law enforcement and other situations. Many agree with us that this is a step too far that crosses a line that should never be crossed as it would be an affront to human dignity.

We welcomed the decision last November by Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) states to start considering the questions raised by the emerging technology of “lethal autonomous weapons systems.”

The strong turn-out last May by more than 80 nations and dynamic deliberations indicate there is broad interest and appetite for continuing this work in 2015. So we must make sure this was not a “one-off.” Next month, we urge nations participating in the CCW meeting to agree to a mandate that creates a formal group of governmental experts to continue the work through expanded discussions.

It's clear to us that dedicating only four more days of talks in the course of an entire year—as happened in 2014—is not an adequate response to the multiple concerns that have been raised. The current speed of technological change requires urgent deliberations and much more rapid action.

We must ensure future deliberations at the CCW on killer robots not simply be a repeat of the 2014 meeting, which requires going deeper in exploring substantive aspects, such as the notion of meaningful human control.

Doing it differently next time also means being more open and inclusive by bringing in women experts and experts from more nations. It's time to put an end to the all male-panels or “man panels” that unfortunately characterized the 2014 meeting.

The CCW is not the only place where “killer robots” should be considered as the special challenges raised by these weapons systems have relevance to other multilateral fora. As the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions shows, there is an important role for the Human Rights Council to play on this emerging international issue of concern.

We know from CCW Protocol IV on blinding lasers that a preemptive ban is achievable. We know from the humanitarian disarmament path carved by the Mine Ban Treaty that much can be achieved in a short period of time when nations take responsibility for acting and work in cooperation with the UN, ICRC, and non-governmental organizations. We know that if we follow this way of working and stay focused on our goal, the negotiation of a legally binding instrument that establishes the principle of human control over targeting and attack decisions is not just possible, but inevitable.

But taking such bold leadership requires sound policy and domestic support. We urge all nations to develop and articulate their policy on fully autonomous weapons in consultation with relevant actors, including our civil society experts.