



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

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

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On behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

As Delivered

Thank you Mr. Chair.

The last multilateral meeting held at the United Nations to discuss concerns raised by fully autonomous weapons, also known as lethal autonomous weapon systems, was in April 2016.

Since then, concerns have continued to mount over these future weapons, that, once activated, would select and fire on targets without meaningful human control. Funds continue to be invested in the development of weapons systems with decreasing levels of human control in the US as well as in China, Israel, South Korea, Russia, the UK, and elsewhere.

In 2014–2016, approximately 80 countries attended three informal CCW meetings on lethal autonomous weapons systems at the UN in Geneva together with key UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. These meetings helped increase awareness and understanding of the ethical, human rights, legal, operational, proliferation, technical, and other challenges posed by these weapons.

At their Fifth Review Conference in December 2016, CCW states agreed to formalize their deliberations on lethal autonomous weapons systems by establishing a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) to meet twice in 2017. We welcomed this incremental step, which we said demonstrated progress by moving the deliberations to the next level and raising the expectation of an outcome because past GGEs have led to the negotiation of draft CCW protocols.

Yet 2017 has been a lost year thus far for efforts to address lethal autonomous weapons systems. The Group of Governmental Experts still has not convened, ostensibly due to financial challenges stemming from the failure of key states to pay their outstanding CCW dues.

The GGE is now slated to meet for a week in November. From the draft programme, it still looks like a lot of talk but little action, with no concrete expected outcome. There appears to still be too much reliance on outside experts at a time when the new GGE setting has raised the expectation of more substantive engagement by the governments themselves.

At the end of September, key states such as Brazil finally paid their overdue CCW funds, but this does not solve the CCW's broader financial problems. How are states expected to make progress if they don't meet in the first half of the year? How are you going to make progress without dedicated Secretariat staff supporting your work?

The Group of Governmental Experts has been tasked with further exploring the issue and agreeing, if possible, on "recommendations on options." Identifying such options at the CCW should be a swift exercise as there are only three real outcomes: 1) a ban protocol, or 2) a protocol containing restrictions (regulation), or 3) no new protocol.

Since 2013, 19 countries have endorsed the call to ban fully autonomous weapons, which is a goal shared by our Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. Dozens more have affirmed the importance of retaining meaningful or appropriate or adequate human control over critical combat functions. This level of interest in taking action shows there is likely a strong foundation of support for creating new international law.

We urge all states to participate substantively in the first meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts next month, which is open to all countries regardless of whether they have ratified the CCW. We appreciate the preparations for this meeting by GGE chair Ambassador Amandeep Singh Gill of India and his team.

We call on states to pursue a revised mandate at the CCW's annual meeting on 22–24 November 2017 that continues the Group of Governmental Experts and requires that it meet for at least four weeks in 2018 to lay the groundwork necessary to negotiate a new CCW protocol on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

The window for preventative action is fast closing. The CCW process on lethal autonomous weapon systems could and should result in a new CCW protocol banning these weapons, but it should not take many years to do so. A long, drawn-out process that achieves a weak or no result must be avoided.

Permitting machines to take a human life on the battlefield or in policing, border control, and other circumstances is a moral line that should never be crossed. We state ready to work with states who share this concern and our objective of securing a preemptive ban on fully autonomous weapons now, before it is too late.

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