



## **CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS**

### **Focus on Meaningful Human Control of Weapons Systems**

*Third United Nations meeting on killer robots opens in Geneva*

(Geneva, 11 April 2016) – Countries should affirm the necessity of meaningful human control over the capacity to select and attack targets, and agree to start negotiating a preemptive ban on fully autonomous weapons, said the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots as a third round of multilateral talks on the matter opened today at the United Nations in Geneva.

“Any decision to use force should be made with great care and respect to protect the value of human life and dignity, which only humans are capable of doing,” said Nobel Peace Laureate Ms. Jody Williams of the Nobel Women’s Initiative, a co-founder of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. “Countries should embrace the principle of meaningful human control over targeting and kill decisions and agree to swiftly begin negotiations on a preemptive ban on killer robots.”

Low-cost sensors and advances in artificial intelligence are making it increasingly possible to design weapons systems that would target and attack without further human intervention. If the trend toward ever-greater autonomy continues, the concern is that humans will start to fade out of the decision-making loop, first retaining only a limited oversight role, and then no role at all. Several nations with high-tech militaries, particularly the United States, China, Israel, South Korea, Russia, and the United Kingdom, are moving toward systems that would give greater combat autonomy to machines.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots fundamentally objects to permitting machines to take a human life on the battlefield or in policing, border control, and other circumstances. Launched in April 2013, the global coalition of more than 60 non-governmental organizations calls for a preemptive ban on the development, production, and use of fully autonomous weapons systems. This can be done by creating new international law as well as through domestic legislation.

The matter of “lethal autonomous weapons systems” (another term for fully autonomous weapons) is being considered by countries at 1980 Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), a framework treaty that prohibits or restricts certain types of conventional weapons of concern. Its 1995 protocol banning blinding lasers is an example of a weapon being preemptively banned before it was acquired or used.

Many of the CCW’s 122 “high contracting parties” are expected to attend the third meeting on lethal autonomous weapons systems at the UN in Geneva on 11-15 April 2016, in addition to UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and civil society groups coordinated by the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. Chaired by Ambassador Michael Biontino of Germany, the meeting continues deliberations on the subject held in April 2015 and May 2014.

“Several countries and manufacturers affirm that they have ‘no plans’ to develop lethal autonomous weapons systems. Such pledges are welcome, but insufficient as they’re not a permanent solution to what’s coming if states fail to take action,” said Prof. Noel Sharkey of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control, a co-founder of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. “Policy commitments not to develop or use these weapons systems may crumble as soon as opponents acquire them. The risks are too high to ignore so the only logical way to avoid that is to legislate the ban.”

Nine countries have endorsed the call for a ban on fully autonomous weapons since 2013: Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Egypt, Ghana, Holy See, Pakistan, State of Palestine, and Zimbabwe.

Many countries have been drawn to the notion of meaningful human control over weapons systems since the inception of the international debate. More than 30 states have specifically addressed the principle or concept of human control in their CCW statements, usually characterizing it as meaningful, appropriate, or effective. Most of these states explicitly support the requirement for meaningful human control and almost all have called for more in-depth discussions on the approach.

“If states will not confirm that there needs to be meaningful human control over weapons then they are deliberately leaving the door open for systems that can kill people without that control,” said Richard Moyes of Article 36, a co-founder of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. “The technology may be complicated, but the solution is simple - start negotiations for an international treaty to make lethal autonomous weapons illegal.”

Article 36 came up with the term “meaningful human control” in a [2013 memo](#) to CCW delegates and Moyes will elaborate on its key elements in his presentation to the CCW’s Tuesday morning session on definitions of lethal autonomous weapons systems. Article 36 has prepared several publications for the CCW meeting, including one on the [current UK position](#) on fully autonomous weapons reviews.

The agenda for the third CCW meeting is packed with 34 experts presenting over eight sessions on autonomy, definitions, laws of war, human rights and ethics, and security concerns including operational risks. Friends of the chair include diplomatic representatives from Chile, Colombia, Finland, France, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Sri Lanka, and Switzerland. Several countries—Canada, Holy See, Japan, and Switzerland—have provided working papers in advance of the meeting elaborating their views on key issues under discussion.

Countries participating in the Geneva meeting will not take any formal decisions as the aim is to continue to build a common base of knowledge about technical, ethical, legal, operational, security, and other concerns relating to the weapons. However, they “may agree by consensus on recommendations for further work for consideration” by the CCW at its Fifth Review Conference on 16 December 2016.

Civil society experts are playing a leading role in helping to increase understanding of meaningful human control and inform this central aspect of the debate. For example:

- Bonnie Docherty will address a [side event briefing](#) on Thursday to present her 16-pp report for Human Rights Watch and Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic on "Killer Robots and the Concept of Meaningful Human Control." The report reviews legal precedents for control and finds that meaningful human control over the use of weapons promotes compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law, notably distinction and proportionality, and is also crucial to international human rights law. Human Rights Watch is a co-founder of and coordinates the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.
- Dr. Heather Roff of Arizona State University, who is also a member of ICRAC, has authored a new briefing on "Meaningful Human Control, Artificial Intelligence, and Autonomous Weapons" together with Moyes of Article 36. On Monday afternoon, Roff will address a CCW session to consider "mapping autonomy" as well as a [side event briefing](#).
- Prof. Toby Walsh of the University of New South Wales, who is speaking at a [side event briefing](#) on Thursday, helped draft an [open letter](#) issued in July 2015 and signed by more than 3,000 artificial intelligence experts that calls for a ban on "offensive autonomous weapons beyond meaningful human control."

**For more information on the third CCW meeting on killer robots, see:**

<http://www.stopkillerrobots.org/2016/04/thirdccw/>

**For more information on the Convention on Conventional Weapons, please visit:**

[http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/37D51189AC4FB6E1C1257F4D004CAFB2?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/37D51189AC4FB6E1C1257F4D004CAFB2?OpenDocument)

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