



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

PRESS RELEASE

Majority call for a new ban treaty to retain human control over force

Small number of pro-killer robot states block efforts to take substantive action

(Geneva, 3 September 2018) Support for new international law to ban fully autonomous weapons—killer robots—and thereby retain meaningful human control over the use of force is growing rapidly. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is dismayed that a small number of pro-killer robot states actively prevented progress towards this objective at their week-long meeting on lethal autonomous weapons systems. The meeting concluded in the early hours of Saturday, 1 September after states adopted a report containing more than 20 non-binding principles and recommendations.

“Time is running out to draw a normative line on autonomy in weapons systems and prevent dehumanizing the use of force,” said Mary Wareham of Human Rights Watch, coordinator of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. “Measures that fall short of new international law will be insufficient to prevent the world from going down the dangerous path of developing fully autonomous weapons.”

The campaign strongly objects to permitting the development of weapons systems that, once activated, would be able to select and attack targets without human intervention. Doing so would be abhorrent, immoral, an affront to the concept of human dignity and principles of humanity, with unpredictable consequences for civilian populations around the world.

There was strong convergence on the need to retain some form of human control over weapons systems and the use of force at the sixth Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) meeting. The 88 participating states recommended continuing the deliberations next year, but did not agree on the best way to achieve this objective.

A clear majority of states proposed commencing negotiations in 2019 on a new treaty. Many states called for a preemptive ban on the development and use of lethal autonomous weapons systems, including Colombia, Iraq, Pakistan, Panama, a group of African states and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) group of states. Austria, Brazil and Chile recommended a new CCW

mandate “to negotiate a legally-binding instrument to ensure meaningful human control over the critical functions” of weapons systems.

Some states suggested the CCW focus on future deliberations on other measures, such as a non-legally-binding political declaration proposed by France and Germany to outline principles such as the necessity of human control in the use of force and the importance of human accountability. While steps towards curbing the development of these weapons are welcome, this declaration will simply not go far enough to protect humanity from these weapons. Nothing short of new international law will suffice.

A handful of states—Australia, Israel, Russia, South Korea, and the United States—said that the talks on fully autonomous weapons should continue, but strongly opposed any work aimed at a new treaty or any other new measures. They repeatedly expressed their desire to explore potential “advantages” or “benefits” to developing and using lethal autonomous weapons systems. With the exception of Australia, these states are most deeply involved in developing autonomy for weapons systems.

The CCW states parties were tasked with making a recommendation on future work to the CCW's annual meeting in November. Despite the fact that a majority of states called for a legally-binding instrument, and many called for a political declaration, these approaches were rejected due to the consensus decision-making rule used by states at the CCW.

States will take their final decision on future work at the CCW’s annual meeting on 23 November 2018.

“Our campaign is frustrated that the only recommended action states could manage to agree on was to continue with their current mandate of exploring ‘options’ for future work,” said Wareham. “The longer it takes states to negotiate a new international treaty, the stronger our campaign will grow.”