



# CAMPAIGN TO **STOP** KILLER ROBOTS

9 October 2020

Sophie Wilmès  
Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
rue des Petits Carmes 15  
Brussels 1000  
Belgium

CC: Ms. Ludivine Dedonder, Minister of Defence

RE: Preventing lethal autonomous weapons systems

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, a global coalition of 165 non-governmental organizations in 65 countries working to ban fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

We welcome the pledge by the new federal government of Belgium to “take the initiative to get a regulatory framework on fully autonomous weapons systems, and strive for an international prohibition.” We encourage Belgium to seize the opportunity to take a leadership role in working in cooperation with like-minded states to launch negotiations on a new international legally binding instrument without delay. Belgium should not hesitate to do its part to prevent development, production and use of these weapons systems that, once activated, would select and attack targets without meaningful human control.

Such an initiative already has the firm support of the federal parliament in Belgium, which adopted a resolution on 19 July 2018 urging the government to support international efforts for a prohibition on fully autonomous weapons, also known as lethal autonomous weapons systems. Additionally, in March 2019, then-Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defense Didier Reynders acknowledged the “humanitarian and ethical problems” posed by such weapons systems and indicated his support for international regulation.

It also demonstrates that Belgium may finally heed the December 2017 call by 116 of Belgium’s top roboticists, AI experts, and scientists urging the government to actively support efforts to conclude a new treaty banning fully autonomous weapons. These experts did not stand alone. A 2019 survey showed 71% of the Belgian population to be in favor of an international ban on fully autonomous weapons.

We are encouraged by Belgium’s active participation in the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) meetings held since 2014 on the dangers raised by lethal autonomous weapons systems and

welcome Belgium's work with other states to elaborate the key components of human control over the use of force to be used in an international normative framework.

The CCW talks on killer robots have entered a critical stage as the Sixth Review Conference is fast approaching in December 2021. However, the CCW has only taken incremental steps over the past seven years that fall far short of the legally-binding instrument that is needed. Meanwhile, military investments in artificial intelligence and emerging technologies continue unabated.

It is therefore imperative that bold action be taken to create a new international treaty to prohibit and restrict fully autonomous weapons. This is a goal sought by dozens of states, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, thousands of artificial intelligence and technology experts, more than 20 Nobel Peace laureates, and our Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The International Committee of the Red Cross also finds there is an urgent need for internationally agreed limits on autonomy in weapon systems to satisfy ethical concerns and ensure compliance with international humanitarian law.

Much greater ambition is required to satisfy growing demands for a new international treaty to ban fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the use of force. This November, Belgium should use the next CCW meeting on killer robots and annual CCW meeting to affirm its commitment to make effective progress on the detailed substance and express its desire to launch negotiations on a legally binding instrument fully autonomous weapons.

Belgium has a hard-earned reputation as a champion of humanitarian disarmament as demonstrated by its leading role in the Ottawa Process that led to the adoption of the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty and the Oslo Process to create the 2008 treaty prohibiting cluster munitions. This engagement shows how Belgium accepts and is committed to developing international legal constraints in warfare and on weapons that cause unacceptable harm. By working to prevent such harm in the future the new government can claim to make "credible contributions to efforts maintaining international peace and security".

Minister, we encourage you to express your support for the goal of launching negotiations on a new international treaty to ban fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the use of force. A new international treaty is an ethical imperative, legal necessity, and attainable now.

We will continue to engage with Belgian officials on this concern and stand ready to support Belgium to achieve our common goal of banning killer robots now.

Sincerely,



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\* The [Campaign to Stop Killer Robots](#) is coordinated by Human Rights Watch and led by a Steering Committee of 11 non-governmental organizations: Article 36, Amnesty International, Association for Aid and Relief–Japan, HRW, International Committee for Robot Arms Control, Mines Action Canada, Nobel Women’s Initiative, PAX, Pugwash, SEHLAC, and WILPF.