



CAMPAIGN TO **STOP** KILLER ROBOTS

Opening Statement by the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots
Humanitarian Disarmament Forum 2020
19 October 2020

Delivered by Mary Wareham, Campaign Coordinator

On behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, a warm welcome to the Humanitarian Disarmament Forum, which we are proud to co-host together with Soka Gakkai International.

We acknowledge your diverse experiences and collective contributions—paid and unpaid—to advancing humanitarian disarmament and saving lives.

This is the ninth Forum and the first to deliberately focus on racism and on how to be genuinely intersectional in the ways we work and engage with each other.

I want to briefly explain why the Campaign decided to host the Forum on this topic and outline the approach the organizing team has taken.

Our Campaign is alarmed by unrestrained investments into military applications of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies. If left unchecked, this will lead to a world of autonomous killing by machines. So we call on governments to launch negotiations on a new international ban treaty to retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

Weapons systems are increasingly enabled to use computer programming and sensors to identify and select targets. Without regulation, this may lead to systems that use force by matching sensor inputs to a pre-encoded “target profile” of characteristics drawn from data sets. This would cross a moral line and raises a host of fundamental questions, not least, who will be targeted?

Racism and discrimination play a central role in the use of force and in the development and use of these and other weapons we fight against. But we should pause before exploring these issues further and taking action.

There’s a saying in humanitarian disarmament that it’s “not about the weapons, but the people.” The people referred to are the victims and survivors of weapons and armed violence. They are

the clearance operators, health workers, and rehabilitation specialists working daily to address the harm caused.

Preventing and mitigating human suffering from weapons is the main driver behind our work. But if we are doing this for the people, we must ask, who is working to advance humanitarian disarmament, as well as how are we working together?

Our community celebrates and prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion. It has made great strides to be gender-inclusive and adopt a feminist approach.

But let's be honest. Too few steps have been taken to ensure we walk the talk and incorporate an anti-racist and race-inclusive approach on a wide scale. We tend to focus so tightly on our arms issues that we sometimes forget that the way we work together matters as much as what want to achieve.

So, we must recognize and reckon with the reality that racism and discrimination have permeated humanitarian disarmament for too long. This must be the starting point.

This discussion must center the experiences, realities and oppressions faced by people of colour, including within our community. Acknowledging and addressing how white supremacy impacts our community is essential to build greater solidarity with our colleagues of colour. We must make space and provide a platform to people whose voices are often unheard or undervalued.

Some terms and concepts used here may be unfamiliar to you. So please look through the readings and watch the videos available the Forum website as they will be discussed during our time together over the coming days and course of the next year.

Beware that parts of this process may be uncomfortable as they involve unlearning preconceptions and unconscious biases. This means listening to what others say with an open mind, even if it is not easy to hear. This requires doing your utmost to avoid creating feelings of fear, shame, or defensiveness.

This is not about me, but I do want to say it came as a huge shock earlier this year to realize how complicit I myself have been in perpetuating structural and systemic racism, indeed white supremacy.

We are grateful to the Forum's support team of volunteers, identified by the '♥HDF' before their names and pronouns. They are helping to ensure all participants respect the code of conduct that you have committed to abide by. They may contact you directly if there is a breach. Please

reach out to a team member if you feel you want support due to something has happened in this space.

By registering to attend the Forum, you have made an active commitment to the process. So please give it your full attention. Be brave, but humble, and come ready to become equipped with tools to help dismantle racism, however it manifests.

Action plans and pledges are needed and will come. But first we must learn together so that our actions speak louder than words. We are counting on you.

It's now time for a live performance by Amahla, followed the Forum's keynote speaker, Dominique Day, chair of the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.