



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

Statement to the CCW GGE on lethal autonomous weapons systems

Geneva

24 September 2020

As delivered by Mary Wareham, Human Rights Watch for the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Thank you Chair,

As the previous chair's commonalities paper notes, the last CCW Review Conference established this Group of Governmental Experts "to explore and agree on possible recommendations on options" relating to lethal autonomous weapons systems.

This group must strive to identify those options and provide recommendations on them by the CCW's 2021 Review Conference.

The reality is that the regulatory response comes down to the question of whether existing international law is sufficient to address all the serious concerns raised by removing human control from the use of force.

This week's deliberations show how, after more than seven years of talks, states still have many doubts, questions, and concerns about the sufficiency of existing international humanitarian law to address those concerns.

This week there were again many calls to move to negotiate a legally binding instrument. Some proposed such a treaty prohibit or restrict lethal autonomous weapons systems. Some suggested it retain meaningful human control over the use of force. We note China's suggestion to emulate the CCW protocol on blinding lasers.

In the view of the Campaign, a new international treaty is the only logical outcome to these deliberations.

Compilations of existing international humanitarian law, promises of increased transparency, and compendiums of best practices in legal reviews of new weapons have been proposed. These are not the answer. Indeed, it is premature to undertake them at this time.

And, as many have said, the guiding principles agreed to by the CCW in 2018 and 2019 were never intended to be an end in themselves. These too are insufficient to fulfil the mandate of the Group.

With respect to political declarations, we recall that in September 2019 the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and other countries endorsed a declaration on lethal autonomous weapons systems. Political declarations certainly have merit, but in the case of killer robots are insufficient.

As the commonalities paper finds, further work is required to determine the type and extent of human involvement or control necessary to ensure compliance with applicable law and respond to ethical concerns. As Sri Lanka and others have observed, the centrality of human control is fundamental.

There is a need for so much more than just “continued and focused engagement.” It’s time to lay the groundwork for negotiating the legally binding instrument that is urgently needed to ban fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

We urge much greater ambition as a new international treaty is the only way forward. It is the normative framework, the regulatory framework that the world urgently needs.

If it is not possible to launch negotiations on a legally binding instrument by the Review Conference, then it will be time to find another forum to not only discuss content but achieve this goal.

Thank you.