

# BUILDING A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN

**Erin Hunt**  
Mines Action Canada

For the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots to be successful internationally, we'll need to create strong national campaigns working to change national policies and campaigning in support of the international efforts. It can be daunting to try to change national policy but with a strong and smart national campaign, it is possible. Based on my experience campaigning nationally on landmines, cluster munitions and nuclear weapons, this chapter outlines a few of the key points to building and maintaining a national campaign.

## SET GOALS AND PLAN YOUR CAMPAIGN

First things first, you and your team should determine what the goals of the national campaign are. It is going to be much easier to build a national campaign if you can tell people what you are working towards. Since this is the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots campaign kit, I'm going to assume that the overarching goal is to get your country to support the negotiation of a new treaty banning autonomous weapons systems, also known as fully autonomous weapons. That's great but you should have some smaller goals along the way as well that tell people how you are going to achieve our collective goal.

I always aim for SMART goals, you know specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound.

So instead of our country supports a ban on autonomous weapons, a better goal would be 'in 2018 our country states their current policy regarding autonomous weapons in an international forum.' When you are starting out small realistic and achievable goals will help build momentum.

Once you set some goals, it's time to come up with a plan. Different organizations have different ways of planning their campaigns; for some it is a formal strategic development process, for others it is an informal discussion. More resources on how to plan your advocacy strategy are available in another chapter. Just make sure your team is onboard with the plan and that everyone knows the plan.

A campaign plan will help you stay on track to meet your goals and will keep us all focused on banning autonomous weapons. The plan should

be flexible to accommodate new developments but clear enough that you won't get distracted. Once you know what you want to do, it's time to find the people to help you do it.

## ENLIST ALLIES

You can create a successful national campaign with a small number of people, but you will need to enlist some partners in your country. You do not all need to do the same things the same way but allies or partners will be very helpful. There may

be people already working towards a ban on autonomous weapons systems in your country, but you will also need to bring some more people into the campaign. If you

haven't seen the Dancing Guy Leadership video, have a watch <http://youtu.be/fW8amMCVAJQ> because it is the best demonstration of why it is important to bring others into your campaign.

As part of Campaign to Stop Killer Robots you will likely already have some ready-made allies. Other partner organizations of the Campaign should be willing and eager to join forces. Don't forget to check and see if you have local branches of any of the large international organizations in the Campaign like Human Rights Watch, WILPF, ICRC or Amnesty International. You can see the list of Campaign to Stop Killer Robots members here: [www.stopkillerrobots.org/members](http://www.stopkillerrobots.org/members).

The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement (RC/RC) is starting to work on this issue, but they aren't quite ready to call for a pre-emptive ban on autonomous

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weapons. That policy doesn't mean that you should ignore your national Red Cross or Red Crescent society; in fact it's the opposite. The RC/RC carries a lot of moral weight; their traditional neutrality and commitment to humanitarian principles mean that most likely your national RC/RC will be taken quite seriously. The RC/RC movement may not be fully on board with a ban on autonomous weapons yet, but they have a wealth of expertise about international humanitarian law which is useful to building the argument for a ban. One thing to keep in mind when working with national RC/RC societies is that the movement's neutrality may require them to take a more behind the scenes role in the national campaign, but they are good people to stay in contact with. To reach out to the national RC/RC society in your country check out the contact list <http://bit.ly/19cE0d8> and send them an email asking to speak to the person working on autonomous weapons systems, disarmament or international humanitarian law.

Beyond the RC/RC national society and any Campaign to Stop Killer Robots members present in your country, other non-governmental organizations will be excellent allies for your national campaign. Humanitarian and human rights organizations will be natural partners for you. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is unique among disarmament campaigns in that our other natural partners include private companies working on AI and robotics, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) experts and academics, think tanks, research institutes and engineering firms. The threats posed by autonomous weapons systems affect

everyone so think creatively about who might be interested in working with you, student societies and youth organizations, trade unions, professional organizations, faith communities.

In my campaigning, I view journalists, bloggers and media outlets as allies as well. They can help you get your message out and will help shape the national conversation about your campaign and our work towards a ban on autonomous weapons systems. The chapter on Social Media will give you more information on how to reach more allies.

Once you have identified potential allies, how to enlist them will be up to you. Some national campaigns have held roundtables to introduce a large number of organizations to the issue and the campaign all at once; others have met with individual organizations to tailor their partnership proposal to each organization but you might have a different idea entirely. Maybe you have allies sign a letter of support for the issue to demonstrate the breadth of support for a ban on autonomous weapons systems in your country. You are the expert on what will work best in your national context. The key is to get people on your team and then you've got to make sure to keep them informed and coordinated.

## COORDINATE, COMMUNICATE, AND COORDINATE SOME MORE

With a plan and allies, you are pretty much unstoppable as long as you coordinate with your allies and keep the lines of communication open. Share the plan with your allies so they

***"Communication and coordination will be the difference between a campaign that works and a campaign that flails."***

know what the goals are and how everyone can contribute to reaching those goals. Keep your allies informed about the campaign, what's going on and what's next. Some tools you can use for keeping people informed is the Campaign's listserv and website. Communication and coordination will be the difference between a campaign that works and a campaign that flails.

How you communicate and how often you are in touch will depend on your style but regular communication will allow you to keep energy up and keep everyone engaged.

## WORK WITH DECISION MAKERS AND PARLIAMENTARIANS

When you are lobbying internationally, you will often meet with diplomats and government officials. National campaigning is not much different. Meeting regularly with government officials to discuss the national policy and the campaign more broadly is an important yet often overlooked aspect of national campaigning. You can also meet with government officials at other levels of government like at the state or city level to gather support for a ban on autonomous weapons systems. Government officials write briefings and often pass information on to the top decision makers in your government so staying in touch with them will help you get your messages up to higher levels in the government. In the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots context, we are not just working with the foreign ministry, try to reach out to the ministry of defense as well as the ministry responsible for science and technology. These other ministries might not be used to working with disarmament organizations so make sure you start from the beginning and be ready to explain how disarmament treaties work. Government officials can be your allies in

advancing policy change in your government. Keep in mind, these government officials are the people you will be seeing again and again at international events and at national events, so it will be very beneficial to cultivate a good relationship with them even if you disagree on the issue.

In most countries, politicians will have the final word on your country's policy about autonomous weapons systems so it is crucially important to include working with politicians in your national campaign plan. In Canada, we've had the most success working in a multi-partisan manner when dealing with our federal government. We meet with all parties (not just the governing party) to discuss our issues and ask for their support of our campaign goals. Keeping friendly parliamentarians updated through letters, emails and phone calls can help build a sense of partnership and encourage them to stay focused on our issue amidst the many issues calling for their support. In addition, we encourage supporters to write to their MPs and the relevant minister to share their views about disarmament.

Meeting with politicians sounds a lot more intimidating that it really is. We often forget that politicians are just normal people. Parliamentarians and politicians are your representatives so your views should matter to them. As long as you review the resources available about autonomous weapons systems and the ban, plan your asks and practice your arguments, you most likely will know more about autonomous weapons systems than the parliamentarian or the politician.

I've spent quite a bit of time trying to get policy changes through Canada's parliament with some success but it has been a learning experience. I'm going to share some of the little tips and tricks I've figured out through all this work in parliament.

- **Dress the part** – it sounds superficial but it is easier to be taken seriously by parliamentarians when you dress appropriately. You'll know what is appropriate in your country but in all countries if you look like someone who knows their stuff people are more likely to listen.
- **Tailor your message** – know who you are meeting and research their interests, their issues and their biography so you can shape your message to them. A ban on autonomous weapons systems will be relevant to everyone you just need to figure out how the issue is relevant to the person you are meeting. For example, if you are meeting someone who represents an area with a university you might want to mention how the development of autonomous weapons could affect public perception of robotics more generally and harm researchers at universities.
- **Staff members are important** – having good relationships with political staff is as important as maintaining a good relationship with the parliamentarian. The staff are more likely to have time to talk to you, they will be the ones who help write speeches, they can influence the priorities of the parliamentarian and they may be the ones who decide if you get a meeting or not.

## ADAPT TO YOUR NATIONAL SITUATION AND HAVE FUN

In addition to your campaign plans, Campaign to Stop Killer Robots will send out action alerts when a collective effort is needed. The action alert is a great opportunity to get your national campaign mobilized. Make sure to adapt your actions to the national context to help the action gain traction in your country. Maybe you might need to make changes for cultural, environmental or political reasons. For example, the International

Campaign to Ban Landmines held a “lend your leg” campaign that involved rolling up a pant leg for a day to draw attention to the landmine issue. To allow the action to adapt to cultural contexts they provided suggestions that did not involve exposing skin; to adapt to a tense political situation one national campaign changed their plan and two mascots led the campaign with an awareness message rather than issuing political call for their country to join the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty and to adapt to the remarkable cold in Ottawa, Canadian campaigners asked people to only roll up their pant leg only long enough for a photo.

National campaigning is hard work so make sure you have fun while doing it. Public events often get better reception if they are fun and unusual. One very fun campaign action that comes to mind is when colleagues in South Korea rode the subway dressed as cluster bombs to bring attention to their country's continued presence outside of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Not only was the action fun for the campaigners, it was fun for spectators and newsworthy. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons campaigners have used art actions to convert images of nuclear weapons into other things through the Bombs No More activity or allowed to people to Eat the Bomb using nuclear bomb shaped cookies or cake (delicious and fun). Even if it is just celebrating your team members' birthdays or bringing a treat to a meeting, having fun in your campaign will keep everyone motivated and engaged.

## CELEBRATE AND KEEP MOMENTUM GOING

I won't lie to you there will be setbacks, some governments aren't going to be supportive of a ban on autonomous weapons systems right away and

you might not achieve all your goals on the timeline you want. With national campaigning, you risk getting tunnel vision and feeling very discouraged by national setbacks. There are a number of ways to deal with setbacks. The first is to find a win in every loss. For example, in our lobbying of Canada's Parliament about cluster munitions, we were not able to get the changes we want in the legislation but we have forced a small concession from the government and had our campaign actions cited in parliamentary debate. We may not have gotten everything we want but we have got the government to admit the legislation was flawed and fix one of those flaws so that's worth celebrating.

Another way to deal with setbacks is to use them as campaigning opportunities. If your country does not announce its policy or makes statements about how autonomous weapons could be

helpful, despite your best efforts, take it as an opportunity to reach out to the media and friendly parliamentarians to ask your government to explain themselves. Disappointment can open a window for further discussion and a better result in the future. I keep this I.F Stone quote near my desk for just these disappointing setbacks:

*“The only kinds of fights worth fighting are those you are going to lose, because someone has to fight them and lose and lose and lose until someday, somebody who believes as you do wins. In order for somebody to win an important, major fight 100 years hence, a lot*

*of other people have got to be willing – for the sheer fun and joy of it – to go right ahead and fight, knowing you're going to lose. You mustn't feel like a martyr. You've got to enjoy it.”*

If you are just not reaching your goals, always keep an eye on the global progress towards a ban on autonomous weapons systems. Global success can be very motivating even if you aren't seeing much progress at the national level.

Regardless of whether or not you are meeting all your goals, make sure you celebrate your successes and the small victories that will come your way.

Good news keeps your partners excited about the campaign, show progress and keeps your momentum going. Did your government attend an international meeting on autonomous weapons systems? Great, let people know! Did you get a response to a letter?

Wonderful, celebrate that the government is paying attention! Did AI experts release a public letter calling for a ban? Amazing, share the text! You get the idea – if you are excited, the energy will be infectious and spread through your campaign.

A strong national campaign will help move the global conversation along. We need national campaigns to ensure that states are not sleepwalking towards a future of autonomous weapons. Your victories are our victories and our victories are your victories.