



CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS

Statement to the Convention on Conventional Weapons annual meeting

Geneva

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Delivered by Mary Wareham, Human Rights Watch on behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Thank you Mr. Chair.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is the rapidly growing coalition of more than 130 non-governmental organizations in 60 countries working with urgency to prohibit fully autonomous weapons, also known as lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Mr. Chair, it's abundantly clear from the Convention on Conventional Weapons deliberations since 2014 that such weapons systems raise a host of fundamental ethical, moral, legal, accountability, operational and security challenges. These will only increase until there is regulation.

Weapons systems that would select and engage targets on the basis of sensor processing and that do not allow for meaningful human control will cross the threshold of acceptability and must be prohibited.

The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots urges states to launch negotiations here at the CCW or elsewhere on a legal-binding instrument to ban fully autonomous weapons and preserve meaningful human control over the use of force. As we know well by now, this goal is now firmly shared by dozens of states, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, non-governmental organizations, and technology companies and workers.

Increasingly we find that this goal is shared by the general public. A new poll out this week of ten European countries shows that three-quarters of those surveyed want their governments to work towards an international ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

One key finding is that the men and women surveyed supported the goal of a killer robots ban treaty in equal numbers. But note that for the minority of respondents who did not express support for a new treaty, more men opposed such a treaty than women. More women were undecided on the question of banning killer robots than men.

Mr. Chair, the CCW has been building a shared understanding on this issue for years now. But it struggles to agree on credible recommendations for multilateral action due to the objections of a handful of military powers, most notably Russia and the United States. Yet again, a couple of

states can abuse a concept of ‘consensus’ to curb the ambition of a majority of the participating states and prevent a more focused mandate that would enable a more productive conversation.

It’s time to chart a new pathway forward. Last month at the United Nations General Assembly, foreign ministers from dozens of countries highlighted the importance of multilateral action on killer robots by signing on to the high-level political declaration presented by France and Germany.

With the political declaration behind us, we ask: what’s next? Commitments to discuss vague ‘normative frameworks’ and additional ‘guiding principles’ are a form of diplomatic treading water. You do not have time or money to waste on inconclusive deliberations. We have to ask if the purpose of these CCW talks to legitimize the development, production and use of killer robots? Because it increasingly looks like that to us. Is this what you mean by “operationalize”?

We have been listening carefully for any initiatives that you plan to undertake next year to address this concern outside of this forum as two weeks of CCW meetings per year are completely insufficient to make any meaningful progress. We welcome the symposium that Brazil plans to hold next February and urge all of you to consider how to advance discussions outside of the CCW.

Our Campaign will hold a regional meeting next month in Pakistan and then a global meeting of our membership in Argentina in February. We are focusing on building national understanding of this issue and seeking bold political leadership, which is clearly needed to achieve the goal of a new treaty.

To close, I was to remind you all that our coalition is not driven by concerns over “killer robots running amok” but rather by the urgent need to tackle the serious threats that fully autonomous weapons pose to our very humanity.

A new international ban treaty is the normative framework that’s urgently needed to prevent a dangerous future of lethal autonomous weapons systems. A new treaty is both achievable and necessary. It is a humanitarian priority and an ethical obligation.

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