



Convention on Conventional Weapons Policy Brief
November 2020

Two fundamental questions

Increased autonomy in determining **where**, **when** and **against what** force is applied presents profound ethical, moral, legal and operational challenges as well as serious risks to peace and security.

There are two fundamental questions that states need to answer:

1. Would certain weapons systems or configurations be unacceptable *per se*?
2. How can *meaningful* human control be ensured over any technologies that remain?

Our perspective

For the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, certain autonomous weapons systems are unacceptable *per se* and must be prohibited. These are weapons systems that:

- Use sensors to automatically identify and apply force to **people**, as they fundamentally undermine human dignity.
- Cannot be meaningfully controlled, for example because system processes are **too complex** for users to effectively understand what their effects will be, or because a system **changes its mode of operation** and cannot therefore be used responsibly or in compliance with international humanitarian law.

For other weapons systems, those with aspects of autonomy but which are not unacceptable *per se*, we urge states to continue to elaborate the necessary elements of *meaningful* human control. This requires positive obligations, including to control the **location** and **duration** of system use, and the **specification of targets** to preserve ethical and legal values and enable responsibility and accountability.

The common factor in all technologies in this area is the use of sensors to determine specifically where, when and against what force is applied. Developing a response requires states to take a **broad view** of the technologies and resist efforts to arbitrarily narrow the scope of discussion or to spend time negotiating definitions at this point.

Participation and process

All states should participate in the next CCW Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) meeting on 2-6 November as well the annual Meeting of High Contracting Parties, which are open to all states as well as registered institutions and civil society groups. The issue of autonomy in weapons systems **concerns all states** and must not be left only to highly militarised nations seeking to maintain hegemony through technology.

States should develop coherent and comprehensive national and collaborative positions on the structure of regulation needed. We should not allow narrow workstreams to distract from addressing the **two key points** at the top of this paper.

We should work together to prepare for and to mandate formal negotiations. Such negotiations **must be launched in 2021 at the latest** – ahead of the Review Conference. Failure to do would fatally undermine public trust and confidence in the CCW framework's ability to solve this challenge.

Calls for regulation

Currently, **30 countries** explicitly call for prohibitions on fully autonomous weapons whilst a still larger group affirm the need to retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

Recently, the new Belgian government in September 2020 declared that “[o]ur country takes the initiative to come to a regulatory framework on fully autonomous weapon systems, thereby aiming for an international ban.” Argentina’s Senate issued a proclamation in February 2020, reiterating the government’s support for the goal of banning killer robots. In August 2020, Costa Rica’s Minister of Justice and Peace outlined the ethical and moral unacceptability of lethal autonomous weapons and stated that such weapons have no place in society.

More than 65 CCW states parties have endorsed various group statements calling for a new international treaty to prohibit and restrict lethal autonomous weapons systems. Most recently, Iraq and eleven Arab states parties to the CCW called for such a ban treaty in September 2020, reiterating that other measures cannot replace the legally binding instrument necessary to maintain human control over the critical functions of weapons systems.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of more than 120 states has repeatedly called for a “legally binding international instrument stipulating prohibitions and regulations on lethal autonomous weapons systems.” In 2018, a group of African states recommended launching negotiations on a legally binding instrument on fully autonomous weapons “at the earliest” as weapons systems “that are not under human control should be banned.”

At the 75th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2020, Pope Francis warned that lethal autonomous weapons systems would “irreversibly alter the nature of warfare, detaching it further from human agency.” Since 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons systems, which he regards as morally repugnant and politically unacceptable.

More than 4,500 artificial Intelligence experts, 160 faith leaders, and 26 Nobel Laureates support the call to ban killer robots. The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is a global coalition of more than 165 non-governmental organizations from 65 countries working to ban fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the use of force.

For more information on the Campaign and its recommendations, please contact:

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