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### EDITORIAL: BE BOLDER TO PREVENT A FUTURE OF KILLER ROBOTS

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# BE BOLDER TO PREVENT A FUTURE OF KILLER ROBOTS

Mary Wareham | Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Expectations are rising that states will take bold action to address mounting concerns over fully autonomous weapons aka killer robots. There's increasing recognition that permitting the development of weapons systems that would select and engage targets without meaningful human control raises a myriad of moral, legal, accountability, technological, and security concerns.

Yet the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) is unfortunately still aiming too low and going too slow for our Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

We recognise the work that states have put into the eight CCW meetings on this topic since 2014. We were encouraged to see states agree on a set of "possible guiding principles" at last year's GGE. This showed agreement is possible in this forum, which can often feel polarised by today's troubled world.

But the recommendations contained in the draft conclusions and recommendations of this Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) meeting on killer robots are unambitious and ambiguous. More guiding principles and other measures that fall short of new international law are completely insufficient to prevent a future of fully autonomous weapons. We remain deeply disappointed at the lack of reference to the calls from many states to move to negotiate a legally-binding instrument, including the demands from 28 states for a ban treaty.

The CCW is a framework convention, which some regard as a "normative framework," that was built to be flexible enough to respond to emerging threats and new developments. If it cannot rise to deal with the challenges posed by killer robots then it's time for another road to the ban treaty that we seek.

Our coalition of non-governmental organisations is disturbed at how these CCW talks on fully

autonomous weapons have become more technical and less values-based since they were formalized by the Fourth Review Conference in 2016. We're worried that the CCW is no longer looking at key concerns such as ethics and morality, potential humanitarian impact, and human rights.

We firmly agree with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that a "human-centered approach" is needed here at the CCW. Look at how the phrase "human control" is gradually being written out of the CCW lexicon and replaced by weaker wordings of human judgment, human element, human machine interaction, human responsibility, and so on. To us, the concept of human control is stronger and necessary because it is clear and comprehensive, encompassing both judgment and actions.

Enshrining the principle of meaningful human control over the use of force requires both prohibitions and positive obligations to ensure that these weapons systems do not undermine ethical values.

Over the past year the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots coalition has nearly doubled in size, to a current total of 113 non-governmental organizations in 57 countries. As our numbers grow so does our ability to engage new endorsers and supporters.

The next generation faces unprecedented threats, from climate change to killer robots. Is it morally acceptable to leave the task of regulating lethal autonomous weapons systems to them? Because that's what may happen if serious action is not taken here at the CCW.

Be bolder and stronger. This GGE should recommend to the next Meeting of High Contracting Parties that the CCW begin negotiations on a new protocol to retain meaningful human control over the use of force and prohibit fully autonomous weapons.

# SURVEY OF GLOBAL TECH SECTOR SHOWS URGENT NEED FOR LEGAL FRAMEWORK ON LAWS

Daan Kayser | PAX

*Survey of 50 leading tech companies shows many are at risk of contributing to the development of lethal autonomous weapons*

The private technology sector plays a key role in developing technologies relevant to the issue of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS). Increasingly, tech companies are cooperating with military organisations. The tech sector can also therefore play a key role in preventing LAWS from ever being developed. The importance of this responsibility is demonstrated by the many tech workers at companies like Google and Microsoft protesting the use of the technologies they helped develop being adapted or applied to lethal military purposes. New research by PAX however, shows the majority of tech companies are not prepared and have no safeguards in place to prevent their products from (even unintentionally) contributing to the development of LAWS.

PAX's new report, *Don't be evil?*, surveys 50 companies and ranks them on three key risk factors: do they produce relevant technology that could be used for autonomous weapons; do they already have military contracts; and do they have a policy on autonomous weapons? Out of the 50 companies surveyed, 21 are of high concern as they have a negative score on all points, including Microsoft and Amazon. Another 22 companies rate a medium concern. Only seven companies show best practices to prevent the development of lethal autonomous weapons.

The Chinese company Sensetime is a case in point. It sells image-identifying artificial intelligence (AI) software that can recognise objects and people and is used by various government departments. Although currently not used in weapons systems, it is clear how image identification software like this will be crucial for the functionality of any autonomous weapons system. Another example is the Canadian company AerialX that produces the DroneBullet, a kamikaze drone whose key feature

is its machine vision target system that allows the system to autonomously, identify, track, and engage an approved target set. Without clear safeguards in place these companies risk crossing the line in the development of lethal autonomous weapon systems.

The responsibility of preventing the development of LAWS cannot be left with the private sector alone. Positively in recent years a substantial part of the tech sector has taken steps to demonstrate support for regulatory action against LAWS. In 2015, over 4500 AI and robotics experts called on the UN to take action through a legal ban. In 2017, 116 chief executive officers (CEOs) of tech companies spoke out against LAWS. In 2018, the German Industry Association also called for a ban on lethal autonomous weapons. It is clear that states must give guidance and clarity on what technology is acceptable, and when the line to too much autonomy is crossed.

After over five years of discussions in the CCW without any concrete results, states risk being outrun by reality. A legal framework is urgently needed to provide a clear line on what is acceptable. Many in the tech sector are asking states to start taking their ethical, moral, and legal responsibilities seriously and provide clarity on where to draw the line.

For more information and the full report, please visit [www.reprogrammingwar.org](http://www.reprogrammingwar.org).

*PAX is co-founder and member of the leadership of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.*

# CCW REPORT

Reaching Critical Will is the disarmament programme of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the oldest women's peace organisation in the world. Reaching Critical Will works for disarmament and the prohibition of many different weapon systems; confronting militarism and military spending; and exposing gendered aspects of the impact of weapons and disarmament processes with a feminist lens. Reaching Critical Will also monitors and analyses international disarmament processes, providing primary resources, reporting, and civil society coordination at various UN-related forums.



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## CCW REPORT

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The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of WILPF or the Campaign.