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# Finnish civil society organizations' submission on autonomous weapon systems to the UN Secretary General

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Finnish civil society organizations Peace Union of Finland, Finnish Peace Committee, Committee of 100, Technology for Life, Women for Peace, and the Union Of Conscientious Objectors appreciate the opportunity to submit our views to the United Nations Secretary-General in response to [Resolution 78/241](#), entitled “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems”. As members of the international Stop Killer Robots<sup>1</sup> network, we are committed to advocating for a new international law on autonomy in weapons systems.

This submission provides a summary of our views on this issue, highlights some specific humanitarian, ethical, and security challenges related to autonomous weapons systems, and outlines ways to address these concerns through a legally binding instrument.

## Ethical concerns

Increasing autonomy in weapons systems means that machines are beginning to replace decision making of humans in the use of force. Machines are incapable of making complex ethical evaluations or understanding the value of human life. A machine does not understand that it is killing, and therefore life and death decisions should never be delegated to machines.

As artificial intelligence develops, systems become increasingly difficult to understand or to predict. Humans can't influence the rapid decisions executed by a machine. Moreover, who would be responsible for a possible war crime committed by an autonomous weapon system? Holding a human responsible for the actions of a weapon system they can't adequately control would be problematic, leaving victims and their loved ones without satisfactory explanation or justice in cases of grave injustice. Concerns posed by a lack of responsibility or accountability for violations of law must not be accepted or ignored.

## Security concerns

The development and proliferation of autonomous weapons systems pose significant threats to global security and stability. The pursuit of keeping up with advancing military technology

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<sup>1</sup> Stop Killer Robots is a coalition of more than 250 non-governmental organizations and academic partners working across 70 countries towards an international treaty on autonomous weapons systems that ensures meaningful human control over the use of force and rejects the automation of killing.

will likely result in or trigger a destabilizing arms race. The accelerating arms race increases the likelihood of conflicts and endangers international security. In the worst case scenario, an escalation of the autonomous arms race might lead them to be equipped with nuclear warheads, when the decision to annihilate the world would be left to a machine. This risk of escalation must not be ignored.

The deployment of autonomous weapons systems is likely to lower the threshold to go to war. When risks to human soldiers are perceived to be lower, states may become less inclined to seek political solutions. This would make armed conflicts more widespread and increase civilian casualties, suffering and displacement. It also escalates the problems associated with remote warfare.

The rapid speed and subsequent errors from autonomous decision-making, as well as the weapon's malfunction could increase the risk of conflict escalation, or lead to other unpredictable consequences. Artificial intelligence, for instance, can generate incorrect and potentially harmful information or detect things that are not within their range, leading to unexpected outcomes. In life-or-death situations, the necessary system testing to correct these errors would equate to dangerous human experimentation. AWS are vulnerable to hacking and can be manipulated to turn on friendly forces or behave in other undesirable ways. Risk of misuse and hacking would also pose an existential threat to every human being.

## A legally binding treaty is crucial for ensuring a future for humanity

There is an urgent need for the regulation of autonomous weapons systems due to the accelerated advancements in artificial intelligence and increasing autonomy within these systems. Their ability to operate without human control and responsibility raises significant concerns that demand urgent action from the international community. To address these concerns, it is imperative to establish a legally binding international treaty that regulates the development, deployment and use of autonomous weapons systems.

There is growing international support for new rules regulating autonomous weapons systems.<sup>2</sup> We align ourselves with the view advocating for the implementation of the treaty and want to address the threat posed by the development of autonomous weapons systems. A common approach, often referred to as the two-tier approach<sup>3</sup>, suggests that a treaty should prohibit autonomous weapons systems that are deemed ethically and legally unacceptable. All autonomous weapons systems should be subject to regulation through positive obligations to ensure meaningful human control over the use of force.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to numerous scientists, tech workers, religious leaders, and members of civil society, the majority of states support the negotiation of a legally binding instrument. See: <https://automatedresearch.org/state-positions/>

<sup>3</sup> There is wide agreement that a normative framework on AWS should combine prohibitions and regulations. We align ourselves with a view that AWS that would target people, and cannot be used with meaningful human control are deemed ethically and legally unacceptable, and therefore should be prohibited. Positive obligations should ensure that all other AWS are used in line with legal and ethical norms.

## We need to act now

Time is running out; artificial intelligence is advancing at an increasing pace, and its military applications are spreading across all branches of weaponry. A treaty banning and regulating autonomous weapons systems would draw a red line for governments and companies as to what is acceptable and what is not.

We need a treaty even if not all states decide to join it. Global instability and the ambitions of a handful of militarized states already investing in the development of autonomous technologies shouldn't dictate our future, or decrease states' willingness to mitigate the serious risks posed by autonomous weapons systems.

The prohibition of autonomous weapon systems should not be left outside the considerations within the broader regulation of artificial intelligence. We must ensure that militaristic objectives or arms industry interests do not dictate AI development, but rather that it happens democratically and with respect for human rights. It is imperative that we draw the line now, before automated decision-making leads to automated killing.

