

Aotearoa Ban Killer Robots Petition Handover
Virtual Ceremony
29 September 2021

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Thank you to the Campaign, to you Edwina for your tireless dedication, and thank you to the other speakers. And thank you to the hundreds of people who took the time to add their voice to this important issue through signing the petition that is being handed over today.

It is my honour to receive this petition, in my capacity as New Zealand's Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control.

Before speaking to the issue of Killer Robots, I'd just like to reflect for a moment on the idea of petitioning Parliament. Campaigning like this has a long, proud history. It is an important feature of our democracy. It plays a key role in raising public awareness, and it helps to bring issues to the attention of MPs, and the power they can have in bringing change.

I know the issue of autonomous weapons systems, or Killer Robots is of interest and concern to New Zealanders. We saw that reflected in a public survey that was released a few months ago which showed that 72% of those surveyed opposed the use of autonomous weapons in war. I have heard it in the public-facing engagements I've been part of, and I see it reflected here again today through this petition.

But the global community, too, is concerned about the development and proliferation of autonomous weapons. Just last week the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres reiterated his call for a ban during his address to the UN General Assembly's High Level Week. And the Red Cross has called for new binding rules to regulate and ban Killer Robots, a call that I've made no secrets about endorsing.

Our Government is in the process of working through a national policy position on autonomous weapons. Alongside this, our international advocacy will need to have a large multilateral dimension, reflecting that the challenge before us is global in nature.

A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of taking part in a conference hosted by the Austrian government on the issue of human control over weapons systems, where I was able to profile New Zealand's work in the area. New Zealand is becoming recognised as a world leader on the topic, which is why we were invited to participate alongside the Austrian Foreign Minister, the UN's senior-most disarmament official and a representative of the Red Cross. And it's great to see increased momentum being generated behind such an important cause.

Right now, the world's attention is focussed in on Geneva and the Group of Governmental Experts process. But this process has been very slow -frustratingly slow, and the gap between some positions very concerning. But, while that may be the case, the CCW still

offers our best hope at this point in time for multilateral action, and the Group – which is meeting again this week – has been able to achieve some recent progress.

And so, New Zealand remains committed to giving the CCW Review Conference every possible opportunity to succeed this December. But, to achieve a satisfactory outcome, the CCW Review Conference must mandate international negotiations so that we can come together around a table and come to a solution to this problem.

Throughout this process, I've been heartened by your engagement and have been impressed with the international and domestic Campaign. Our mission will not be achieved without the hard work of international organisations, civil society, tech companies, community leaders and many others. Your work is important – as a voice of moral clarity, to remind us of the urgency of the issue, and to hold us to account.

I have no doubt you will continue to do this. Congratulations on this petition.