

**Aotearoa New Zealand
CAMPAIGN TO STOP
KILLER ROBOTS**

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NZ killer robots policy welcome at critical juncture

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The Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign to Stop Killer Robots (ANZKRC) welcomes New Zealand's new policy position on [autonomous weapon systems](#) (AWS), released by the [Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control](#) today, which states that New Zealand will push for new international law to ban and regulate such weapons.

"We are impressed by the effort put into securing all-of-government and tech industry agreement on a principled position on AWS. The new policy is a good basis to move forward on this unprecedented threat to humanity, to global peace and security, and to the foundations of international law", ANZKRC Coordinator Edwina Hughes said this morning.

The policy release comes at a critical juncture as dozens of states prepare for two Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) meetings in December¹ to discuss effective measures to prevent the development and proliferation of abhorrent robotic weapon systems that are designed to use algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) to independently select targets and attack, without any human intervention beyond the initial activation.

There are significant ethical, legal, technical, operational and human security concerns about AWS, which have been widely condemned by the United Nations system, UN member states, parliaments, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), as well as thousands of AI researchers, roboticists and tech experts, non-governmental organisations, faith leaders and youth networks here and overseas.

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Calls for action on AWS have been, and remain, focussed on the need for new international law, as well as national legislation, to retain meaningful human control over the use of force by prohibiting and regulating these weapons.

The Stop Killer Robots Campaign, ICRC, and others have outlined the three key requirements of new law on autonomous weapons as:

- a general obligation to maintain meaningful human control over the use of force;
- prohibitions on autonomous weapon systems that cannot be used with meaningful human control and prohibitions on systems that would target human beings; and
- positive obligations to ensure that meaningful human control is maintained over systems that are not prohibited.

While New Zealand's new policy is consistent with the multiple and urgent calls for action, there are three areas where it could usefully be developed further.

Firstly, while the policy refers to banning weapons that are unpredictable and uncontrollable, it does not mention prohibition of weapons that target humans - that is absolutely essential if the underlying ethical imperative of preventing machines and lines of digital code from targeting and attacking humans is to be prevented, a prospect UN Secretary General António Guterres has repeatedly [described](#) as "*morally repugnant*".

Secondly, there is no mention of national prohibitions or regulations in the new policy, but as we pointed out in our recent submission on the 'Act Now on Killer Robots' Petition to Parliament:

"... it is crucial that New Zealand acts with urgency to develop national legislation on autonomous weapon systems because even when multilateral negotiations get underway, it will take some years for new international law to be negotiated and adopted.

National legislation is something that New Zealand can, and indeed should, do now - it does not need to wait for international action. The ethical imperative to do everything possible to prevent this entirely avoidable disaster for humanity must take precedence over all other considerations."

Thirdly, the statement that New Zealand will support "*interim steps and measures such as non-legally binding guidelines, declarations or norms*" is concerning because that is likely to be encouraged as a means to delay any effective progress by aggressive states that perceive AWS as a path to increased military and political dominance.

We trust these three areas of concern will be addressed as the new policy is developed further. For now, we welcome the commitment that New Zealand will work with like-minded states to push for negotiations on a legally binding instrument on AWS to begin as a matter of urgency, and will encourage other states to support this.

We call on New Zealand to work with other concerned states to prepare a proposal to be put to the forthcoming CCW meetings for a mandate to begin negotiations on a legally binding instrument containing prohibitions and regulations on AWS, and an obligation to ensure meaningful human control of all weapon systems at all times.

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Further information

- ANZKRC site, <http://stopkillerrobots.org.nz>
- The ANZKRC Submission on the 'Act Now on Killer Robots' Petition to Parliament, 17 November 2021, is available on request from stopkillerrobots@xtra.co.nz
- Global Stop Killer Robots Campaign, <https://www.stopkillerrobots.org>

About the Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign to Stop Killer Robots (ANZKRC)

ANZKRC is the New Zealand national campaign of the global Stop Killer Robots Campaign, established in 2013 and coordinated by Peace Movement Aotearoa. ANZKRC currently has eleven supporting organisations (the Artificial Intelligence Forum of New Zealand, Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, Christian World Service, Human Rights Foundation, Human Rights Lawyers Association, Oxfam Aotearoa, Pax Christi Aotearoa New Zealand, Peace Movement Aotearoa, Quaker Peace and Service Aotearoa New Zealand, The Peace Place, and WILPF Aotearoa); as well as a growing network of concerned researchers and academics; and a developing youth network.

Reference

¹ The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons will meet from 2 to 8 December, followed by the Sixth CCW Review Conference from 13 to 17 December. The Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons is the commonly used name for the 1980 Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects. The purpose of the CCW is to ban or restrict the use of specific types of weapons that are considered to cause unnecessary or unjustifiable suffering to combatants or to affect civilians indiscriminately