

Aotearoa New Zealand



**CAMPAIGN TO STOP
KILLER ROBOTS**

PO Box 9314, Wellington 6141

Tel + 64 4 382 8129

Email stopkillerrobots@xtra.co.nz

Web www.stopkillerrobots.org.nz

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Killer robots: Will New Zealand step up this week?

More than 70 states, including New Zealand, are expected to attend the sixth Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems which begins tonight at the United Nations in Geneva, and continues until Friday.

The unprecedented challenges raised by the development of fully autonomous weapon systems (also known as lethal autonomous weapon systems, or killer robots) have gained widespread attention since the first CCW meeting on this issue in May 2014. There is a rapidly rising level of concern about the development and future deployment of weapon systems that would select and engage targets autonomously, without any meaningful human control; and there is an increasingly urgent need for decisive and concerted action by the international community for a preemptive ban on the production, development and use of fully autonomous weapons.

Thousands of scientists, including artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics experts, leaders of AI and robotics companies, more than 20 Nobel Peace Laureates, religious leaders, international law experts and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) around the world have called for a prohibition on fully autonomous weapons. At an AI congress in Sweden in July, the Future of Life Institute released a Lethal Autonomous Weapons Pledge endorsed by more than 200 technology companies (including New Zealand based Aeronavics) NGOs (including the AI Forum of New Zealand), 2,600 AI experts and other individuals committed to "neither participate in nor support the development, manufacture, trade, or use of lethal autonomous weapons".

The key legal, operational, ethical, technical, proliferation and other concerns around these weapons have been identified and explored; and a significant number of states now support the establishment of new international law that specifies the necessary level of human control required over the use of force, and over the critical functions of target identification, selection and engagement.

Momentum towards a ban treaty is growing, with Austria and other states proposing that negotiations begin in 2019 on a new treaty to retain meaningful human control over weapon systems and to ban killer robots. Last month Belgium's parliament adopted a resolution calling on the government to support international efforts for a prohibition on the use of autonomous weapon systems, and to ensure that the Belgian army will never use such

weapons; and the European Parliament recommended that European states work towards an international ban on weapon systems that lack human control over the use of force.

New Zealand's position on fully autonomous weapon systems, however, remains unclear. Although the then Minister of Foreign Affairs stated, in a letter to the Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign to Stop Killer Robots (ANZKRC) on 12 July 2013, that New Zealand would develop national policy in this area, this has still not been done; and New Zealand has not yet made a statement explicitly calling for a preemptive ban on killer robots.

It is deeply concerning that New Zealand - which has in the past taken a leading role in the development of new humanitarian disarmament law to prohibit particularly harmful weapons (for example, being actively involved in the negotiations for the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions and the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons) - has remained on the sidelines of the debate on this unprecedented threat to humanity.

The ANZKRC's concerns about the government's position on fully autonomous weapon systems are shared by the AI Forum of New Zealand, which earlier this year recommended that New Zealand review its position on fully autonomous weapons and consider taking a more prominent international leadership role in the movement to agree an international treaty on their use.

When announcing the reinstatement of the Cabinet position of Minister for Disarmament and Arms Control in February this year, the Prime Minister stated it was to "ensure New Zealand's voice is heard on disarmament and arms control issues" and said: "we must recommit ourselves to the cause of non-proliferation and disarmament, and to the norms and rules which support those endeavours".

Yet, as the new report, *Heed the Call: A Moral and Legal Imperative to Ban Killer Robots*, released by Human Rights Watch and Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic last week points out, permitting the development and use of killer robots would undermine established moral and legal standards - fully autonomous weapons not only pose an unprecedented threat to humanity, but also to the foundations of international humanitarian and human rights law.

New Zealand must step up this week at the CCW meeting and announce its full support for negotiations to begin in 2019 on a new treaty to retain meaningful human control over weapon systems and to ban killer robots. Furthermore, national policy leading to legislation to prohibit the development, production or use of fully autonomous weapons systems in New Zealand must be developed as a matter of urgency.

Further information about this week's CCW meeting, with background information on developments to preemptively ban fully autonomous weapon systems, will be released by the global Campaign to Stop Killer Robots in Geneva today at 6pm New Zealand time.

Links to further information

- Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, www.stopkillerrobots.org.nz
- ‘Killer robots: Will New Zealand step up this week?’, Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 27 August 2018 - on Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/notes/peace-movement-aotearoa/killer-robots-will-new-zealand-step-up-this-week/1844300188950675> - on Twitter, <https://twitter.com/PeaceMovementA/status/1033830244044533760> - formatted for printing, <http://www.converge.org.nz/pma/anzkrc270818.pdf>
- *Artificial Intelligence: Shaping a Future New Zealand*, Artificial Intelligence Forum of New Zealand, May 2018, p 86, https://aiforum.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/AI-Report-2018_web-version.pdf
- Lethal Autonomous Weapons Pledge: “We, the undersigned, call upon governments and government leaders to create a future with strong international norms, regulations and laws against lethal autonomous weapons. These currently being absent, we opt to hold ourselves to a high standard: we will neither participate in nor support the development, manufacture, trade, or use of lethal autonomous weapons. We ask that technology companies and organizations, as well as leaders, policymakers, and other individuals, join us in this pledge”, <https://futureoflife.org/lethal-autonomous-weapons-pledge>
- Global Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, www.stopkillerrobots.org
- ‘Killer robots fail key moral, legal test: Principles and public conscience call for preemptive ban’, Human Rights Watch and Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic, 21 August 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/08/21/killer-robots-fail-key-moral-legal-test>
- Report - *Heed the Call: A Moral and Legal Imperative to Ban Killer Robots*, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/21/heed-call/moral-and-legal-imperative-ban-killer-robots>

Media contacts

- Aotearoa New Zealand Campaign to Stop Killer Robots: Edwina Hughes, Campaign Coordinator, tel 04 382 8129, email stopkillerrobots@xtra.co.nz
- Global Campaign to Stop Killer Robots: Mary Wareham, Campaign Coordinator, tel +1 (646) 203-8292, email wareham@hrw.org