

CAMPAIGN TO **STOP** KILLER ROBOTS

StopKillerRobots.org

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UK Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

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Rt Hon Ben Wallace MP
Secretary of State
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall
London SW1A 2HB

16.06.20

Dear Secretary of State,

As the UK Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, we are writing to encourage you to continue to listen to expertise of scientists.

Discussions in the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) about lethal autonomous weapons systems have attracted strong interest since 2014, with a strong convergence on the essential need to retain human control over the use of force, and widespread recognition that building common understandings on what the nature of “human/machine interaction” should be when it comes to using weapons systems is a key area for further work by states. The goal of an international ban treaty is now sought by 30 states, as well as UN Secretary General António Guterres.

You will be aware that the Chair of the 2020 CCW talks on lethal autonomous weapons systems, Ambassador Janis Karklins of Latvia, has proposed that states participating in the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) provide recommendations on the “development of aspects of the normative and operational framework” on such weapons. To that end, he has invited CCW commentaries or working papers focusing on “operationalizing” the CCW’s guiding principles.

To achieve progress, talks at the CCW must now focus on detail and substance. To build a shared conceptual framework, the Campaign encourages the UK government to submit to the CCW a paper that elaborates the government's views in particular on the concept of human control, and how their desired normative and operational framework could be structured and implemented.

To this end the Campaign recommends the UK uses its CCW commentary to:

1. Identify factors to help determine the necessary quality and extent of human control over weapons systems and the use of force;
2. Express the UK's preferences with respect to developing a normative and operational framework and what its basic content should be – be it a legally-binding ban instrument or another form of regulation or agreement.

We are pleased to share with you the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots' commentary submitted to Ambassador Karklins, which gives some more detail of our position on these issues.

We believe that the UK Government should focus on building recognition and engagement around the valuable content you have already contributed to the CCW on aspects of human control,¹ which could help stimulate greater convergence among states on useful points of substance and common understanding in this area.

We look forward to hearing your response and more detail about the approach the UK government will be taking in the talks this year.

The coalition would also appreciate an update on the status of the work being done with DSTL to produce a paper on human control that was slated for the end of May. We are eager to digest and discuss the new thinking you will be bringing to the GGE on this central issue.

We also note that the UN Secretary General's 2020 report on the Protection of Civilians is the first since 2013 to highlight concerns over lethal autonomous weapons systems. We agree with the UN Secretary General that the use of these weapons would present a major challenge to the protection of civilians in armed conflict. The report finds that "all sides" see a need to retain human control or judgement over the use of force. It describes differences over the adequacy of existing international law and notes the growing number of states calling for a ban. We would be interested to hear the UK government's reaction to these points.

The Coronavirus pandemic shows why we must pay attention to warnings from scientists and heed calls to collectively handle major threats to humanity, from climate change to killer robots. It makes exceptionally clear the importance of global cooperation.

Yours Sincerely,

Oliver Sprague
Program Director – Military Security and Policing
Amnesty International UK

¹ For our analysis of these, see Article 36, 'From "pink eyed terminators" to a clear-eyed policy response? UK government policy on autonomy in weapons systems' <http://www.article36.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/UK-policy-on-autonomy-in-weapons-systems-2020.pdf>

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