

# Stopping Killer Robots

## A Guide for Policy Makers





With growing digital dehumanisation, Stop Killer Robots works to ensure human control in the use of force. We are a vibrant, inclusive team driving change to protect our shared humanity for the future. We operate globally with 180+ member organisations. A united voice with national, regional and international effect.

Through increased functionality in artificial intelligence and the processing of data through algorithms, machines are beginning to replace humans in the application of force. This has unpredictable and potentially devastating consequences for humanity.

It is critical for internationally agreed limits on autonomy in weapon systems to be agreed. A new legal treaty is required to avoid a dehumanised future where machines are tasked to kill and apply force, without the safeguards we need.

The campaign to Stop Killer Robots has produced this pamphlet to provide guidance for policy makers around the world in developing a new international treaty to overcome the dangers posed by autonomy in weapon systems.



# What are killer robots?

‘Killer robots’ refers to autonomous weapon systems. These are systems that detect and apply force to a target based on the processing of data from sensor inputs.

In these systems, upon activation, there is a period of time where the weapon system can apply force to a target without additional human approval. The specific object to be attacked, and the exact time and place of the attack, are determined by sensor processing, instead of an immediate human command.

This means the human operator does not determine specifically where, when or against what force is applied.

# Why are they a problem?

Killer robots change the relationship between people and technology by handing over life and death decision making to machines. They disempower, disconnect and dislocate humans in the use of force and raise fundamental ethical and legal concerns.

Autonomy in weapon systems diminishes the control of the human operator and undermines accountability and responsibility in conflict. They raise serious concerns over compliance with international human rights law and the international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality, precaution and the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks, as documented by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The challenges posed by existing methods of remote war would also be amplified through increased autonomy, with humans becoming further detached from the use of force. Algorithmic bias and the augmentation of existing institutional patterns of discrimination would lead to a disproportionate impact against historically marginalized communities and undermine human dignity.

These issues have implications beyond armed conflict, and negatively shape our relationship with autonomy in decision making across all areas of society.

## The Solution

**States must work together to solve these problems before the use of autonomous weapon systems proliferates, and before the threat they pose to the safety and security of the world becomes irreversible.**

Existing laws are insufficient to address the dangers of autonomy in weapon systems. A new international legal treaty is required to provide the necessary certainty and stability that is needed now and in the future.

# Key Elements of a Treaty

**The treaty should include three main elements to overcome the dangers posed by autonomy in weapon systems.**

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## Obligation to Maintain Meaningful Human Control

A general obligation to ensure meaningful human control over the use of force is needed to alleviate concerns about weapons systems that use sensors to detect and engage targets. 'Meaningful' captures the degree of human control required to mitigate operational and ethical hazards and to ensure that existing laws can be substantively applied.

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## Prohibitions

Certain autonomous weapon systems are fundamentally unacceptable and should be prohibited. These include:

**a. Autonomous weapon systems that target people**

These systems would undermine human dignity, converting people into data, to be sensed, sorted and attacked by a machine, open to biased data sets and prejudicial algorithms.

**b. Autonomous weapon systems that cannot be used with meaningful human control**

Certain autonomous weapons systems are intrinsically incapable of meaningful human control and should be prohibited including systems where the location and duration of their functioning cannot be limited, and systems where the external conditions and circumstances that will trigger an application of force cannot be predicted or understood.

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## Positive Obligations

Autonomous weapons systems that are not prohibited should be subject to positive obligations to ensure meaningful human control. These obligations will need to highlight key components that, taken together, are necessary to ensure human control, including decision-making, technological and operational components.

# Who supports a treaty?

**Around the world momentum continues to build behind the call for limits on autonomy in weapon systems through a new international treaty. Killer robots are regarded as a major threat to humanity that requires a swift and strong multilateral response.**

Along with the Stop Killer Robots campaign nearly 100 states have acknowledged the importance of human control over the use of force. Hundreds of tech companies have pledged to never participate in nor support the development, production, or use of autonomous weapon systems. Thousands of artificial intelligence and robotics experts have warned against these weapons and called on the United Nations to take action.

UN Secretary-General Guterres has called autonomous weapons “morally repugnant and politically unacceptable”, and has made multiple statements since 2018 urging states to negotiate a treaty. The International Committee of the Red Cross also said that new law is needed to address autonomy in weapons and has called for a treaty combining prohibitions and regulations.

There is also clear public concern. In IPSOS surveys released in 2019 and 2020 more than three in every five people stated their opposition to the development of weapons systems that would select and attack targets without human intervention.

**Ensuring meaningful human control over the use of force is a humanitarian priority, legal necessity and an ethical obligation. An international response through a legal treaty is urgently required, and the campaign to Stop Killer Robots stands ready to work with partners around the world that are committed to achieving this goal.**

# Steps towards a treaty



## 1 Policy

Governments should develop national policy to work towards a new international legal treaty for the regulation of autonomous weapon systems. This policy should call for prohibitions on systems that cannot be meaningfully controlled and systems that are designed to target humans, in addition to regulation for all other autonomous weapon systems to ensure meaningful human control.

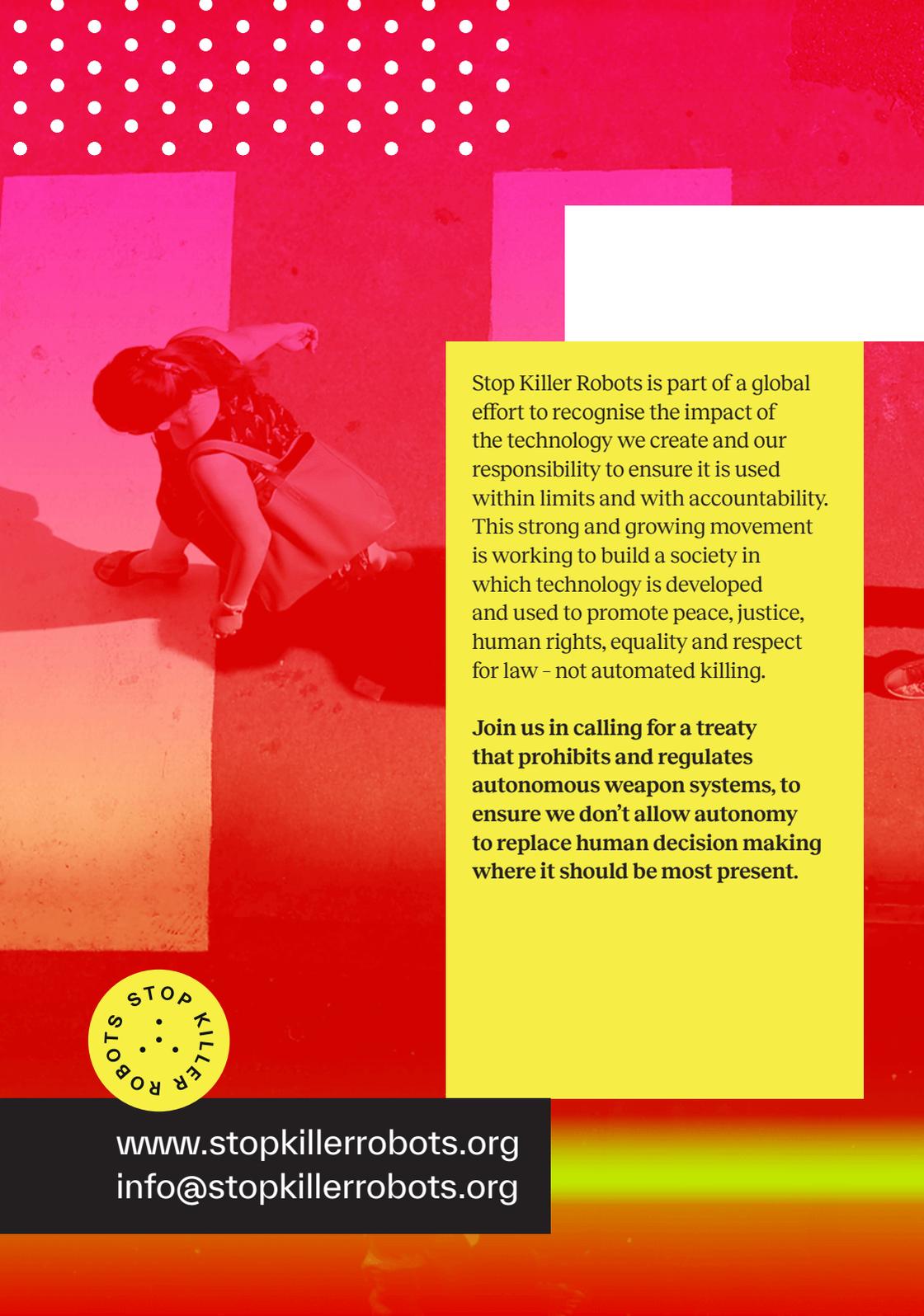
## 2 UN Missions

Diplomats representing states at UN Missions in Geneva and New York should be briefed on the policy and encouraged to take leadership in initiating and participating in multilateral discussions on autonomous weapons. These discussions should lead to the negotiation and signing of an international legal treaty.

## 3 International Lobbying

States should engage with international partners and lobby them to join an international treaty on autonomous weapon systems. This can be achieved through bilateral discussions, or through raising the issue within international forums. Creating a sustainable legal framework on autonomous weapon systems for future generations will require cooperation and solidarity with other states around the world.





Stop Killer Robots is part of a global effort to recognise the impact of the technology we create and our responsibility to ensure it is used within limits and with accountability. This strong and growing movement is working to build a society in which technology is developed and used to promote peace, justice, human rights, equality and respect for law - not automated killing.

**Join us in calling for a treaty that prohibits and regulates autonomous weapon systems, to ensure we don't allow autonomy to replace human decision making where it should be most present.**



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