



5 Reasons why

a resolution at the UNGA is vital for progress on Autonomous Weapons Systems

The development and use of autonomous weapons systems (AWS) involves serious legal, ethical and security risks, with potentially devastating consequences for all of humanity. With evidence of such weapons being deployed in contemporary conflicts, an international legally binding instrument to safeguard against these risks is urgently needed.

The First Committee session of the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in October 2023 provides a crucial opportunity for progress. After 10 years of international discussions without concrete outcomes within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), a resolution will be tabled at the First Committee calling for the United Nations Secretary-General to seek the views of all states and stakeholders regarding recommendations for a way forward. This brief sets out 5 reasons why states should support it.



1. Addressing Human Rights, Ethical,

Humanitarian and Security Concerns

Autonomous weapons systems raise profound legal, ethical, humanitarian and security challenges. Their development and use could lead to the undermining of international human rights and international humanitarian law, an increase in civilian casualties and the escalation of conflicts, and the erosion of human dignity. A resolution at the UNGA calling for states to submit views to the UN Secretary-General will create an opportunity for comprehensive reflection of these implications and ensure that appropriate rules and regulations are considered to respond to these risks.

Discussions within other forums have so far been incapable of providing a holistic approach to the wide range of concerns raised by AWS. At the CCW, a narrow approach focused primarily on international humanitarian law and the potential use of AWS in armed conflict has largely overlooked other concerns, including ethical perspectives, the effects of digital dehumanization, and concerns around proliferation and international security. A First Committee resolution would provide an opportunity for an international discussion to respond to the full range of concerns associated with the development and use of AWS, and for states to demonstrate their commitment to upholding fundamental values, norms, and laws in the face of emerging technologies.

2.

Promoting

Inclusive Multilateralism

The UNGA serves as a forum where states from all around the world can work together to engage with the serious concerns posed by autonomous weapons systems and develop an internationally agreed response. Through the UNGA, states can foster multilateralism and promote transparency, confidence-building, and cooperation among states on this issue, which concerns the whole of humanity.

While discussions have taken place in other multilateral forums, including at the CCW, the Human Rights Council (HRC), and regional and international governmental conferences held in capitals around the world, they have had limits to state participation. The UNGA provides an inclusive and accessible forum in which states from all regions are able to contribute towards an international response.



Responding to

3.

the UN Secretary-General's Call

In A New Agenda for Peace, published in July 2023, the UN Secretary-General issued an urgent call for states to adopt a treaty to prohibit and regulate autonomous weapons systems by 2026. The call was made after extensive consultations with states and stakeholders, and follows a joint statement made by 70 States at the 77th Session of the UNGA calling for the Secretary-General to proactively engage on this issue and urge states to make progress. The First Committee resolution would give support to the UN Secretary-General's call by creating a process for all states to submit their views and suggest pathways towards the launch of international negotiations.

The UN Secretary-General's continued involvement would also enable the undertaking of comprehensive risk assessments and identification of potential safeguards to deal with these challenges. Through research, expert analysis, and multidisciplinary collaboration, Secretary-General can foster a deeper understanding of the implications of the use of AWS, and fuel the development of an international response. The resolution would facilitate the convening of relevant stakeholders, including member states, international organizations, civil society, experts, and industry representatives, to exchange ideas and develop a comprehensive and internationally agreed framework to address the risks posed by AWS.



4.

Building upon existing work

The resolution would complement ongoing multilateral discussions. For the past 10 years, states parties to the CCW have considered the development of the normative and operational framework for AWS. A wide range of views have been proposed, with the majority of states calling for an international legally binding instrument. The Human Rights Council has stressed ‘the imperative that the human element remains central in the use of force’ and at the UNGA in October 2022, 70 states said in a joint statement that autonomy in weapons systems ‘raise serious concerns from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives’. However, despite lengthy UN discussions, substantive outcomes have failed to reflect widespread demands for substantive progress to be made.

Building upon this existing work, including consideration of the range of individual and group working papers submitted by states at the CCW, the resolution offers the potential for states’ positions to be fully reflected in a report of the UN Secretary-General. This would help ensure that the positive contributions made by states are adequately captured and presented in a forward looking document. This process would not only serve to clarify and substantiate existing work, but would provide a guiding vision for the future direction of work.



5.

A Signal

for Urgent Action



The development and use of AWS presents serious risks to all of humanity. Already, over 90 states, the International Committee of the Red Cross, experts in technology and artificial intelligence, and civil society organizations around the world have warned of the serious dangers posed by AWS and called for the urgent launch of international negotiations of a legally binding instrument. There is now an imminent risk of the development and use of AWS proliferating around the world, with potentially catastrophic consequences for international peace and security.

The resolution is imperative for signaling the urgent need for international action, and a willingness of states to undertake that action. While a wide range of states have recognised this urgency, both within their national capacity and within group statements, a resolution calling for urgent progress to be made would be the strongest expression of international demand for progress. This would fuel international action on the issue, and have a positive impact on inter-governmental efforts to urgently launch negotiations.

Conclusion

The emergence of AWS presents a formidable challenge that demands global cooperation and concerted action. After 10 years of international discussions without concrete outcomes, a UNGA resolution is now vital for making progress towards an international framework. By fostering collaboration to address the legal, ethical, humanitarian and security concerns, a resolution at

the UNGA would provide a crucial platform for states to urgently and effectively safeguard against the serious risks posed by AWS.

Through supporting the resolution, states have an opportunity to collectively overcome the serious risks posed by AWS and build a future that upholds international law, ethical principles, peace, and security for all. Stop Killer Robots urges all states to support the resolution at the First Committee of 78th Session of the UNGA in October 2023 and demonstrate that world leaders are able and willing to safeguard the rights and dignities of humanity in the face of rapidly advancing technological change.