

ICRAC opening statement to the 2016 UN CCW Expert Meeting

Delivered by Jürgen Altmann, Deputy Chair, on 12 April 2016

I speak on behalf of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC in short), a founding NGO of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. We would very much like to thank Ambassador Biontino for preparations in chairing this third meeting of experts and for inviting our members to share their expertise. And we thank all of the States Parties for their participation.

ICRAC is an international association of scientists, technologists, lawyers, ethicists and policy experts committed to the peaceful use of robotics and the regulation of robotic weapons. ICRAC members have carried out research on various aspects of autonomous weapons systems and published their results in scientific journals as well as at conferences and in mass media. We are available and willing to provide technical expertise to the High Contracting Parties.

ICRAC urges the international community to seriously consider the prohibition of autonomous weapons systems in light of the pressing dangers they pose to global peace and security. We cannot guarantee the reliability of autonomous systems. Also, they could trigger accidental conflicts and they threaten to increase the pace of autonomous warfare beyond the possibility of human control. A specific issue often overlooked is the interaction between two opposing fleets of autonomous weapon systems. Their interaction could never be tested, it is utterly unpredictable. An analysis of the ensuing instability is posted on our web site at icrac.net.

ICRAC, as a group of scientists, technologists and academic experts, understands the concerns expressed by several States that any new binding instrument banning autonomous weapons should not have a negative impact on the development of autonomous systems for peaceful civilian uses. We want to reassure you that a ban of autonomous weapons lacking meaningful human control would not have a negative impact on civilian uses of robot autonomy. The prohibition of blinding laser weapons has neither hampered lasers in DVD players nor in laser pointers. Biological weapons are forbidden while biotechnology is thriving. For robotics, the same is confirmed by the open letter from the Artificial Intelligence community signed by more than 20,000 scientists. Scientists see a ban not as a hurdle. On the contrary, they see it as providing them an assurance that their work will not be weaponized, or used to create autonomous weapons. A ban will promote innovation in robotics rather than stifle it.

In conclusion, ICRAC encourages the CCW delegates to move towards a preemptive ban on the development, production and use of autonomous weapons systems.