

ICRAC

On behalf of ICRAC I would like to thank the Chair of the CCW expert meeting for setting up and coordinating such a rich and informative program of expert contributions on technical, ethical, legal, and operational issues raised by autonomous weapons systems. ICRAC is equally grateful to panelists, state delegations, and civil society observers for their stimulating contributions to the analysis of these issues. And we thank the Holy See for their statement on Ethical questions this morning.

Many participants in the discussion have been calling for continued expert analyses and clarification of concepts that are crucially involved in the very idea of lethal autonomous weapons systems. At this point of CCW proceedings, however, it is equally important to take stock of converging views that have emerged from expert analyses and to reflect on their ethical and policy implications.

In particular, ICRAC urges CCW delegations to focus on the far-reaching ethical implications of converging expert opinions on two crucial issues: the ethical requirements of IHL and the potential global threats that autonomous weapons present.

On the ethical basis of IHL, distinguished experts in computer science, artificial intelligence, and robotics, as well as the ethical and legal experts we heard from today, have come to the shared conclusion that no autonomous weapon, given current or foreseeable scientific and technological advances, can meet the standards of moral reasoning required for distinction, proportionality, military necessity, and precaution at the level of an experienced human commander. Machines lack moral and legal capacities, and cannot bear moral and legal responsibility in the place of responsible humans. It is thus immoral and irresponsible to delegate decisions to kill to machines.

There are additional concerns regarding the inability to predict the behaviours of complex autonomous weapons, and the intrinsic unpredictability of their mutual interaction, which could be compounded by adaptive and learning algorithms. As the statement from the Holy See, and presentations from the experts make clear, to the extent that the effects of these systems are not predictable, there is no possibility for using them responsibly in the moral and legal sense.

We would add to this the moral responsibility of the States Parties to permit the unregulated development of these systems, with unpredictable results for global security and stability. Autonomous weapons are potentially more threatening to global security than many other conventional weapons. Swarms of autonomous weapons that are capable of initiating coordinated attacks on great numbers of military objectives raise special concerns in connection with a new arms race and its expected impact on global destabilization – up to and including the nuclear domain. The potential threats that these weapons pose to global security are no less real because they sometimes appear in science fiction. Global stability concerns also carry a serious moral weight.

Deliberations about international rules of collective behaviour involve an ethical evaluation of their expected outcomes - of their aggregate benefits and costs. By failing to act decisively, and permitting the development, production, and deployment of autonomous weapons one might expect, as good and desirable consequences, asymmetric battlefield advantages for some actors and possibly a reduction of risk levels for soldiers. However, these short-term and local benefits are largely outweighed by the arms race and global destabilization costs for humanity as a whole that are expected to flow from the propagation of autonomous weapons. Therefore, an ethical evaluation of aggregate benefits and costs in a wide geopolitical context rather than in a narrow and temporally limited context provides strong support for banning the development, production and deployment of autonomous weapons.

In conclusion, ICRAC urges the recognition of converging expert opinions on the grave prospects of allowing autonomous weapons to violate the moral requirements of IHL. We also urge the States Parties to recognize their own moral obligation to the citizens of their nations and all of humanity to preserve

international peace and global security. The convergence of expert opinions points clearly towards the need for a treaty requiring meaningful human control on weapons systems that effectively bans lethal autonomous weapons systems.