

Dear ladies and gentlemen, Mr Chair,

Killer robots will change the fundamental equation of war. First there were human beings without machines. Then human beings with machines. And in the near future we might see machines without human beings, or better said without meaningful human control. It's high time to ask ourselves if such a development is desirable. Over the last year a rapidly growing number of states and other actors expressed concerns about this trend towards fully autonomous weapons and it is encouraging to see how many experts will discuss this urgent issue over the next 4 days.

PAX is Dutch peace organisation with an Oecumenical background and a co-founder of the Stop Killer Robots Campaign. We view fully autonomous weapons as an affront to human dignity and the sacredness of life. PAX recently started an interfaith letter that religious leaders and faith-based groups around the world are signing to to express their ethical concerns about killer robots and to call for a ban. It is striking to see how the issue resonates with people from various religious communities and how strongly people are in favour of a preventative ban.

For PAX the issue is first and foremost an ethical one: humanity should not surrender meaningful control over decisions of life and death to machines. We believe these weapons systems go against the principles of human dignity. Not only the dignity and right to life of those who will be directly affected, but also the dignity of civilians and soldiers in which name these weapons systems will be deployed.

We are pleased that during the upcoming days there will be a session on ethics as well. Because by narrowing our scope to the legal framework, we might neglect the larger and far more important realm of moral and ethical issues. We believe this ethical objection is so important that even if these machines would in theory be able to comply with international law, we should not allow them to be developed, let alone deployed under any circumstances. We cannot reduce complex issues of morality into purely technical issues of legality.

PAX issued a report called Deadly decisions, 8 objections to killer robots. As we are presenting general statements I will not describe all objections here, we will do so during a side event on ethics on Thursday. Copies of the report can be found at the back of the room or on our website.

The issue of fully autonomous weapons is in many ways a complex one and expert discussions on all levels are needed. But the core question for us is this: do we want to delegate the power to make decisions over life and death to a machine? Can and do we want to outsource morality? Or should we pause and see what kind of human control over weapons is adequate or meaningful? While technology rushes forward, we need to take time to ensure that not only lives, but also the concept of the value of human life, are preserved in the long term. PAX is glad we are having this important debate right now and sincerely hope it will be the start of multilateral discussions eventually leading to a ban on killer robots.

Thank you,

Miriam Struyk, on behalf of PAX