

WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM



Reaching Critical Will

**Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Statement to the CCW Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems
13 March 2014**

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has opposed the development of technology for killing since our founding in 1915. Women from all over the world came together during the midst of a world war to protest the slaughter with what were then considered advanced technologies, such as tanks, machine guns, and chemical weapons. Now we are here in the United Nations, which did not even then exist, to speak out against the development of fully autonomous weapons.

We are gravely concerned at the possibility of weapons that may operate without meaningful human control. The use of force has already become too disengaged from human involvement, with the use of armed drones. Autonomous weapons go beyond remotely-controlled drones, devolving life and death decision-making to software and sensors.

Deploying autonomous weapon systems that operate without meaningful human control is not legally or ethically acceptable.

The laws of war and protection of human beings require human engagement. Humans must be in the loop to make decisions about the use of force. The idea of programming a machine to respect international humanitarian law (IHL) and human rights law creates a fundamental challenge to the idea of these laws. Under IHL and human rights law, the legality of an attack is context-dependent. It is generally assessed on a case-by-case basis. Questions of distinction and proportionality cannot properly be resolved through an automatic mechanism.

While some argue that advances in technology might be able to address these issues in the future, there is no way for technology to address the fact that what gives law meaning is free will. The human element is essential. Fully autonomous weapons also raise questions about responsibility and accountability that cannot be addressed by technological advancements.

Beyond the law, giving machines power to target and kill human beings crosses a moral line. It cheapens human life and reduces human dignity. It is, at its essence, inhumane treatment.

A preemptive ban on fully autonomous weapons is necessary to ensure the retention of meaningful human control over targeting and attack decisions. Existing international law is not strong or clear enough to prevent the development of autonomous weapons. IHL governs the *use* of weapon systems, but the development, production, deployment, and stockpiling of autonomous weapons must also be prevented in order to ensure against proliferation.

We welcome the fact that governments have started to discuss this issue at the international level. We encourage delegations here at this meeting to consider how to define meaningful human control and to examine how they can evaluate the lawfulness and morality of future autonomous weapons.

This meeting marks the beginning of vital multilateral consideration of the problems raised by autonomous weapons. This work must continue. We hope the CCW will agree in November 2014 to expand these discussions in a more formal group of experts next year, with the goal of negotiating new international law to prohibit these weapons.

As we work to prevent the development of weapon systems operating outside of meaningful human control, WILPF is also working to ban nuclear weapons, to prevent the use of explosive weapons in

populated areas, to establish and enforce stricter regulations over arms transfers, and to reduce military spending. We do this as part of our work towards a world where technologies are no longer used for killing but in the service of humanity.

WILPF is the oldest women's peace organisation in the world. Reaching Critical Will is its disarmament programme and represents WILPF in the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

www.reachingcriticalwill.org

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