

# AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS



CAMPAIGN TO **STOP**  
KILLER ROBOTS

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## THE ISSUE:

Over the past decade, there have been extensive advances in artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies. AI is being incorporated in nearly all aspects of our lives, in sectors as diverse as healthcare, finance, travel, and employment. Another sphere where AI innovation is occurring at a rapid pace is in the military and law enforcement spheres, making possible the development and deployment of fully autonomous weapons systems which, once activated, can select, attack, kill and wound human targets without meaningful human control. These weapons systems are often referred to as Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) and, more comprehensively, 'Autonomous Weapons Systems' (AWS), which encompass both lethal and less-lethal systems.

The rapid development of these weapons systems could not only change the entire nature of warfare, it could also dramatically alter the conduct of law enforcement operations and pose extremely serious human rights risks.

## TALKING POINTS:

- Countries around the world, including the US, are heavily investing in and developing weapons with increasing autonomy—this raises serious legal, ethical, accountability and security concerns.
- There should be a prohibition on so-called “autonomous weapons systems” in order to ensure meaningful human control over weapons systems.
- An autonomous weapons system without human oversight cannot distinguish between combatants and civilians, which is a breach of international human rights law.
- In law enforcement operations, the use of lethal and less-lethal autonomous weapons systems without meaningful human control will result in unlawful killings and injuries.
- Autonomous weapons systems threaten various fundamental human rights, most notably, the right to life.
- Autonomous weapons systems are also vulnerable to design failures, errors, hacking, spoofing and manipulation, making them unpredictable.
- Autonomous weapons systems are also vulnerable to being used by unscrupulous actors, including non-state actors.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Publicly support the commencement of negotiations for an international treaty which ensures that meaningful human control is retained over the use of force by prohibiting the development, production, transfer and use of AWS.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- Amnesty International. (2015). Autonomous Weapons Systems: Five Key Human Rights Issues for Consideration. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/act30/1401/2015/en/>
- Center for New American Security. (2016). Autonomous Weapons and Operational Risk. <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/autonomous-weapons-and-operational-risk>.
- Human Rights Watch. (2018). Heed the Call: A Moral and Legal Imperative to Ban Killer Robots. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/21/heed-call/moral-and-legal-imperative-ban-killer-robots>

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

Daphne Eviatar  
Director, Security with Human Rights  
(212) 633-4273  
DEviatar@aiusa.org