



International Community Must Act Now to Ensure Combat Will Never Be Outsourced to “Killer Robots”

Unabridged Written Version of Statement by Dr. Matthew Bolton, Membership Secretary of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control, before the Meeting of High Contracting States Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) at the United Nations’ Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, 14 November 2013.

Thank you Mr. President,

I am speaking on behalf of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC),¹ a founding NGO member of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.² Since its establishment in 2009, ICRAC has urged the international community to discuss the **prohibition of fully autonomous weapons systems – “Killer Robots”³** – **in light of the pressing dangers they pose to global peace and security**, in addition to their alarming humanitarian implications for civilians threatened with armed violence.

ICRAC is made up of experts in robotic technology, artificial intelligence, computer science, international security and arms control, ethics and international law. As an indication of our concentration of expertise, over 80% of our members have doctoral or Juris Doctor degrees. As such, **ICRAC is available and willing to provide technical expertise to the High Contracting Parties as they engage in further discussions about fully autonomous weapons systems.**

ICRAC has coordinated the circulation of a **“Scientists Call” to ban fully autonomous weapons systems, signed by more than 270 Computer Scientists, Engineers, Artificial Intelligence experts, Roboticists and professionals from related disciplines in 37 countries**, saying: “given the limitations and unknown

¹ See the ICRAC website: <<http://icrac.net>>.

² The Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is an international coalition of 45 nongovernmental organizations in 22 countries that launched in London on 23 April 2013. The campaign is calling on states to put in place a comprehensive ban on fully autonomous weapons that would be able to select and attack targets without human intervention. See their website: <<http://www.stopkillerrobots.org>>.

³ “Killer Robots” – alternatively called Lethal Autonomous Robots (LARs) or Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) or Fully-Autonomous Armed Robots – are an emerging class of weapons that, once activated, would select and engage targets without human intervention. For further technical details see: Article 36. (November 2013) “Structuring Debate on Autonomous Weapons Systems: Memorandum for Delegates to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).” <<http://www.article36.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Autonomous-weapons-memo-for-CCW.pdf>>.

future risks of autonomous robot weapons technology, we call for a prohibition on their development and deployment. **Decisions about the application of violent force must not be delegated to machines.**⁴

ICRAC urges High Contracting Parties to be guided by principles of humanity in its deliberations on existing and emerging weapons technologies – taking into account considerations of human security, human rights, human dignity, humanitarian law and the public conscience, as well as the justified worries about robotic arms races and proliferation. This means **meaningful human deliberation and control over the use of violence must remain the cornerstone of any eventual global policymaking on robotic weapons.**

ICRAC welcomes the presentation of the Draft Mandate text enabling the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons to convene expert meetings in 2014 to look at the challenges posed by fully autonomous weapons systems. ICRAC also welcomes the statements by more than 40 States which have expressed concerns about autonomous weapons systems. We believe the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons represents a useful forum to begin discussions, though dialogue about autonomous weapons systems need not be confined to this body alone. [END OF ORAL VERSION OF STATEMENT]

In light of our concerns, ICRAC respectfully submits the following recommendations to improve and strengthen the proposed Mandate on autonomous weapons systems before the body.⁵

- 1) **It is not enough to consider only “lethal” autonomous weapons.** We urge the body to broaden the Mandate to include consideration of all autonomous weapons systems, given that:
 - a. Arming autonomous systems with so-called “sub-lethal” or “less-than-lethal” weapons could still cause unnecessary suffering, and
 - b. Autonomous weapons systems could be potentially destabilizing even if they are only programmed to attack materiel, particularly if such systems interacted with each other in unexpected ways.
- 2) By covering only “emerging technologies”, the Mandate may discourage High Contracting Parties from considering the implications of **existing precursor autonomous systems that nonetheless raise unsettling humanitarian questions.**
- 3) While we welcome an Informal Meeting, a Mandate for **a Group of Governmental Experts would more clearly send a message of the seriousness of this matter** to the High Contracting Parties.

⁴ Learn more about the Scientists Call here: <<http://icrac.net/2013/10/computingexperts-from-37-countries-call-for-ban-on-killer-robots/>>.

⁵ This refers to the following Draft Mandate currently under consideration by the 2013 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the CCW: “The Chair will convene in 2014 a [three] day informal Meeting of Experts, from [XX] to [YY] 2014, to discuss the questions related to emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapons systems. He will, under his own responsibility, submit a factual report to the 2014 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention.”

- 4) As experts in this field, we believe the legal and ethical complexities of autonomous weapons systems will be difficult to cover adequately in three days. Thus we suggest amending the Draft Mandate to allow for **a five (5) day meeting**.

*Delivered on behalf of the **International Committee for Robot Arms Control**, by:*

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