



**Convention on Conventional Weapons
Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems**

**General Statement from Human Rights Watch
Delivered by Bonnie Docherty**

May 15, 2023

Thank you.

Ten years ago this month, Christof Heyns, special rapporteur on extrajudicial killing, warned members of the Human Rights Council of the many dangers posed by autonomous weapons systems and called for a moratorium on their development and use.

Six months later, states parties to the Convention on Conventional Weapons took up the matter, and they have been discussing the issue —informally and then formally—for close to a decade, yet with no substantive result.

Progress has been made during that period. As is clear from the statements we have heard today and the chair's draft report, there is a widespread recognition that autonomous weapons systems raise myriad of serious concerns. There is also growing convergence for a two-tiered approach to address this issue, which combines prohibitions and regulations to ensure meaningful human control over the use of force and to prevent targeting of people with autonomous weapons systems.

But states need to do more than agree on the general content of a normative and operational framework. They also need to decide on the form it will take and the forum where it will be negotiated.

With regard to form, the gravity of the threat warrants an international legally binding instrument, which would carry more weight than voluntary measures. A treaty would bind states parties to clear obligations against which they could be held to account. As disarmament precedent shows, it could also influence states not party or other actors by articulating international norms and stigmatizing problematic technology or practices.

At least ninety states have recognized the benefits of and expressed support for a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons systems.

We encourage these states to stay true to their goal of a new legally binding instrument and to find a forum that will allow them to achieve it in a timely manner. They should not allow the forum of the debate to dictate the form of their response to autonomous weapons systems.

Those states that want to address the legal, ethical, accountability, and security concerns posed by autonomous weapons systems should pursue a process in which they can negotiate a new treaty in an efficient and inclusive manner.

When we address these issues in another 10 years, we should not still be rehashing the problems of autonomous weapons systems and the need for new law. Instead, we should be assessing the implementation of a long-adopted, well-negotiated, and widely embraced treaty.

Thank you.