Seventh Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects

20 November 2026

English only

Geneva, 16-20 November 2026
Item 14 of the provisional agenda
Consideration of proposals for additional protocols to the Convention and other proposals

Towards Inclusive International Negotiations on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems - Proposals on the Future Mandate of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and Ensuring the Effective Participation of Observers

Working paper submitted by the International Humanitarian Law & Youth Initiative (IHLYI)*

I. Introduction

1. The rapid developments in artificial intelligence and emerging military technologies raise increasingly complex legal, humanitarian, ethical and security challenges, particularly in relation to the development and use of lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS). These developments underscore the urgent need to make tangible progress towards establishing a clear international framework governing such systems, ensuring their compliance with international humanitarian law (IHL), and maintaining human control over decisions involving the use of lethal force.

2. Over the past years, international discussions on LAWS have witnessed important developments, particularly within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), through the work of the Group of Governmental Experts on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS. These discussions have been complemented by relevant developments within the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, as well as contributions from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), civil society organisations, academic institutions and independent experts.

3. In this context, draft resolution A/C.1/81/L.37, entitled “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems”, represents an important development in the international process and reinforces the need to move towards negotiations on an international instrument regulating these systems. The Seventh Review Conference therefore presents an important opportunity to build on these developments and establish a clear direction for the next phase of international engagement.

4. This working paper constitutes one of the key policy outcomes of the first edition of the IHLYI Youth Lab on AI and Autonomous Weapons, entitled “Youth Perspectives: From the GGE Final Report to the CCW Seventh Review Conference”. It seeks to translate the discussions, perspectives and recommendations developed throughout the Youth Lab into

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

Please recycle

concrete proposals addressed to the Seventh Review Conference of the High Contracting Parties to the CCW.

5. The paper was developed on the basis of expert-led sessions, interactive discussions and a collaborative review of draft recommendations. It seeks to bring the perspectives of young people, particularly those from the Global South and conflict-affected contexts, into the ongoing multilateral discussions on LAWS. It is submitted by IHLYI as a youth-led civil society contribution, reflecting the collective learning and policy discussions of the Youth Lab, without implying formal endorsement by every participant.

6. This working paper advances two principal proposals for consideration by the Seventh Review Conference:

(a) Moving towards negotiations on a legally binding international instrument regulating LAWS, through an initial, time-bound negotiating mandate;

(b) Ensuring the effective and meaningful participation of observers, including civil society organisations, regional and international organisations, and young people, throughout the discussions and future negotiating process.

II. Building on Previous International Discussions and Developments

7. The International Humanitarian Law & Youth Initiative emphasises the importance of building on the outcomes and contributions of previous international discussions on LAWS, ensuring that a future mandate does not simply repeat discussions that have already taken place without advancing towards concrete negotiating outcomes.

8. In this regard, the next phase should build upon:

(a) The reports, outcomes and elements developed within the Group of Governmental Experts on LAWS, including the work undertaken by the Group during 2026;

(b) Previous discussions and proposals submitted within the framework of the CCW, including proposals concerning the development of an international instrument regulating LAWS;

(c) Relevant United Nations General Assembly resolutions and discussions, particularly draft resolution A/C.1/81/L.37;

(d) Relevant discussions within the Human Rights Council concerning the potential implications of these systems for human rights, the right to life and accountability;

(e) Contributions and recommendations from the ICRC, civil society organisations, academic institutions and independent experts.

9. IHLYI considers that these processes provide an important foundation for moving towards negotiations. Their outcomes should be taken into account while ensuring that the legal, humanitarian, technological and security dimensions of the issue are addressed in a coherent and complementary manner.

III. Moving Towards Negotiations on a Legally Binding International Instrument

10. The International Humanitarian Law & Youth Initiative considers that the continuation of general discussions on LAWS, without moving towards a defined negotiating process aimed at establishing international rules, is no longer sufficient to address the legal and humanitarian challenges associated with the development of these systems.

11. Building on developments in the international discussions, particularly draft resolution A/C.1/81/L.37, IHLYI calls upon the Seventh Review Conference to support moving towards negotiations on a legally binding international instrument regulating LAWS.

12. In this regard, IHLYI proposes that the future mandate include an initial negotiating period of one year, with the objective of launching negotiations and making substantial progress towards the preparation of an initial negotiating text for the proposed international instrument.

13. IHLYI emphasises that the proposed one-year period is a recommendation concerning the timeframe for the negotiating process and is not a timeframe stipulated in draft resolution A/C.1/81/L.37. Nor does this proposal imply that the instrument must be fully negotiated, adopted or enter into force within one year. Rather, it aims to ensure the effective commencement of negotiations and the achievement of tangible progress within a defined period.

Proposed Phases of the Negotiating Process

14. IHLYI proposes that the initial negotiating period focus on the following interconnected phases:

Phase One: Building on Existing Elements and Understandings

15. The negotiations should begin by building on the elements developed within the Group of Governmental Experts, previous discussions under the CCW and relevant contributions from other international processes. This phase should aim to identify the common foundations of the proposed international instrument, its scope and the principal issues it should address.

Phase Two: Discussing and Drafting the Substantive Provisions of the Instrument

16. The discussions should move towards addressing the legal, humanitarian and regulatory provisions to be included in the instrument. This should include identifying systems that should be prohibited, systems that should be subject to strict restrictions, and the requirements for meaningful human control and compliance with international humanitarian law.

Phase Three: Preparing an Initial Negotiating Text and Assessing Progress

17. The final phase of the initial period should focus on making progress towards the preparation of an initial negotiating text, identifying outstanding issues requiring further consideration, assessing progress achieved and reporting the outcomes to the High Contracting Parties in order to determine the next steps towards concluding the negotiations.

18. IHLYI considers that this approach would provide a practical and phased pathway from general discussions towards substantive negotiations, while building on previous outcomes and avoiding unnecessary repetition of issues already addressed.

IV. Key Elements of the Proposed International Instrument

19. IHLYI emphasises that the future international instrument should be based on a clear legal and humanitarian approach, addressing the risks associated with LAWS through binding rules that ensure the protection of civilians and compliance with international humanitarian law.

20. In this regard, the negotiations should address the following elements:

1. Prohibiting LAWS that cannot be used in compliance with international humanitarian law

21. The instrument should establish prohibitions on systems that cannot be used in compliance with international humanitarian law, or whose use cannot be ensured to remain under meaningful human control sufficient to enable compliance with relevant legal obligations.

2. Regulating other systems through strict restrictions

22. Systems that do not fall within the category of prohibited systems should be subject to clear and stringent restrictions concerning the circumstances of their use, their operational scope, the environments in which they may be deployed, the types of targets they may engage, and the duration of their operation.

3. Ensuring meaningful human control

23. The instrument should ensure that humans retain the effective ability to understand, assess and exercise control over decisions involving the use of lethal force, including the ability to intervene in or deactivate a system when necessary. Meaningful human control should not be reduced to formal approval or merely technical supervision of a system.

4. Ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law and the protection of civilians

24. The instrument must ensure compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law, particularly distinction, proportionality and precautions in attack, while taking into account the challenges posed by autonomous systems in assessing operational contexts and potential humanitarian consequences.

5. Ensuring accountability and legal responsibility

25. The instrument should address legal responsibility for the development, testing, deployment and use of these systems. Technological complexity or operational autonomy should not undermine the possibility of establishing accountability for potential harm or violations.

6. Weapons reviews and legal and technical assessments

26. The instrument should reaffirm the importance of conducting legal reviews of new weapons, in accordance with Article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, where applicable, alongside the necessary assessments and testing to verify that systems can operate in compliance with relevant legal and humanitarian obligations.

V. Ensuring the Effective Participation of Observers in Discussions and the Negotiating Process

27. The International Humanitarian Law & Youth Initiative emphasises that observer participation is an important element in strengthening the inclusiveness, transparency and effectiveness of discussions on LAWS.

28. Civil society organisations, regional and international organisations, the ICRC, academic institutions and independent experts have contributed to the development of international discussions on these systems through research, legal analysis, humanitarian perspectives and policy recommendations.

29. Accordingly, the future mandate should ensure the continued availability of opportunities for observers to contribute to substantive discussions, present their views and recommendations, and provide relevant expertise throughout the different stages of the negotiating process.

30. IHLYI stresses that effective participation does not imply transferring negotiating or decision-making powers from States to observers. Rather, it means ensuring genuine and

structured opportunities for their contributions to be considered, thereby strengthening the quality of discussions and enriching the process of developing the international instrument.

31. In this regard, the following considerations should be taken into account:

(a) Maintaining opportunities for civil society organisations, regional and international organisations, academic institutions and independent experts to participate in relevant discussions;

(b) Providing observers with opportunities to submit written contributions and recommendations on issues under consideration;

(c) Ensuring timely access to relevant documents and information, in accordance with applicable rules and procedures;

(d) Continuing to provide opportunities for observers to deliver statements and contribute to substantive discussions;

(e) Taking into account the financial, logistical, linguistic and technical constraints that may limit the participation of organisations and participants from countries with limited resources;

(f) Drawing on the field-based, humanitarian and legal expertise of organisations working in conflict-affected contexts.

VI. Strengthening Youth Participation, Particularly from the Global South and Conflict-Affected Communities

32. IHLYI emphasises that young people should be part of discussions concerning the future of LAWS, not merely as beneficiaries of capacity-building programmes, but as stakeholders capable of contributing to the development of policies, recommendations and international discussions.

33. Youth participation is particularly important in this context, given the long-term implications that decisions concerning the development, regulation and use of these systems may have for current and future generations, especially young people and communities directly exposed to the humanitarian consequences of armed conflict.

34. IHLYI also underscores the importance of amplifying the perspectives of young people who remain underrepresented in international discussions and decision-making processes on disarmament and emerging military technologies, particularly young people from the Global South, conflict-affected countries and communities directly exposed to the consequences of armed conflict.

35. The discussions held throughout the Youth Lab highlighted the importance of addressing unequal opportunities for participation, including financial and geographical constraints, language barriers and limited access to multilateral processes and opportunities to contribute to their outcomes.

36. Accordingly, IHLYI calls for the meaningful inclusion of youth participation in future discussions, with particular attention to young people and youth-led organisations from the Global South and conflict-affected contexts. Their participation should not be limited to side events or capacity-building activities, but should also include opportunities to contribute to substantive discussions and submit relevant recommendations and proposals.

37. IHLYI considers that incorporating these perspectives would enrich international discussions and help ensure that future outcomes reflect not only technological, military and diplomatic considerations, but also the humanitarian, social and human rights dimensions of these developments.

VII. Recommendations to the Seventh Review Conference

38. In light of the above, the International Humanitarian Law & Youth Initiative invites the High Contracting Parties to consider the following recommendations:

(a) Support moving towards negotiations on a legally binding international instrument regulating LAWS;

(b) Adopt an initial negotiating mandate of one year, aimed at launching negotiations and making substantial progress towards the preparation of an initial negotiating text;

(c) Build on the work of the Group of Governmental Experts and previous discussions within the framework of the CCW, alongside relevant developments in the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council;

(d) Adopt an approach that prohibits systems that cannot be used in compliance with international humanitarian law or without meaningful human control, while subjecting other systems to strict restrictions;

(e) Ensure that the future instrument addresses meaningful human control, compliance with international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians and legal accountability;

(f) Maintain the effective participation of observers, including civil society organisations, regional and international organisations, academic institutions and independent experts;

(g) Ensure the participation of young people and youth-led organisations, particularly those from the Global South and conflict-affected countries and communities, in substantive discussions concerning the future of these systems;

(h) Take into account the financial, logistical, linguistic and technical barriers that prevent the effective participation of observers and young people.

VIII. Conclusion

39. The International Humanitarian Law & Youth Initiative considers that the Seventh Review Conference presents an important opportunity to make tangible progress in the international process concerning LAWS and to move from general discussions towards negotiations aimed at establishing clear and binding international rules.

40. IHLYI emphasises that adopting a time-bound initial negotiating mandate would provide a practical framework for beginning the development of an international instrument that responds to the legal and humanitarian challenges associated with these systems, while building on the outcomes and contributions of previous international processes.

41. At the same time, ensuring the effective participation of observers and young people, particularly those from the Global South and conflict-affected communities, is an important element in strengthening the inclusiveness of discussions and drawing on diverse expertise and perspectives.

42. IHLYI calls upon the High Contracting Parties to place the protection of human beings and compliance with international humanitarian law at the centre of any future international framework, and to ensure that technological developments do not undermine human responsibility or weaken the fundamental principles governing the conduct of hostilities.