



Submission to the UN Secretary-General on AI in the Military Domain A/RES/79/239



11 April 2025

Peace Movement Aotearoa and Stop Killer Robots Aotearoa New Zealand welcome the opportunity to contribute our views to the UN Secretary-General's report on artificial intelligence (AI) in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security. Our submission briefly outlines our involvement in this issue, and has three sections summarising our position on: a) A new international instrument on military use of AI and autonomy in weapon systems is urgently needed; b) Key focuses of a new international instrument; and c) Scope of a new international instrument. The points below are based on discussions with our member and supporting groups about the content of this submission.

Introduction

Peace Movement Aotearoa is the national networking peace organisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, established in 1981 and registered as an Incorporated Society in 1982. Our purpose is networking and providing information and resources on peace, humanitarian disarmament, human rights and social issues; and we have extensive national networks of member and supporting groups and individuals. We are a founding member of the Stop Killer Robots campaign and coordinate the national Stop Killer Robots Aotearoa New Zealand (SKRANZ) campaign.

SKRANZ was launched in April 2013 to support the global campaign, with a specific national focus on urging New Zealand to take national action to prohibit the development, production and use of autonomous weapon systems; and to take international action to support negotiations on a new treaty to prohibit autonomy in weapon systems. Since 2023 we have widened our focus to include military use of AI as its perils became increasingly obvious.

a) A new international instrument on military use of AI and autonomy in weapon systems is urgently needed

As outlined in our submission for the UN Secretary-General's report on autonomous weapon systems (A/RES/78/241) last year, it has been clear for some years now that rapidly developing technological advances in the use of force and increasing autonomy in weapon systems pose an unprecedented threat both to humanity and to the foundations of international human rights and humanitarian law, which are based on respect for human life and dignity, protection of humanity in times of oppression and armed conflict, and human responsibility and accountability for harm.

The serious ethical, humanitarian, legal, and security concerns posed by these developments have been discussed for more than a decade within United Nations bodies - including the Human Rights Council, meetings related to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and in the UN General Assembly - as well as in regional and national governmental and non-governmental forums.

Even as these discussions have taken place, some states have increasingly incorporated autonomy into military use of force in ways that have already resulted in gross violations of international law with disastrous consequences for civilian populations. It is apparent that the absence of specific international law on autonomy in weapon systems, and with differing interpretation by

some states as to how existing law applies to new technological developments, the risk of proliferation of ever more dangerous and uncontrollable weapon systems is increasing rapidly.

The need for urgency for international action on this has been highlighted over the past eighteen months by, for example, Israel's use of AI-powered target suggestion systems in Gaza to make high explosive strikes on numerous targets possible in a short time frame, resulting in indiscriminate slaughter of civilians and systematic destruction of life-sustaining infrastructure. The reality of digital dehumanisation with catastrophic consequences is now very evident, as is the increasing tendency towards the development and use of autonomous weapon systems that will remove any remaining vestige of humanity from war.

We have noted with concern that states who brought forward A/RES/79/239 include states that have armed and supported Israel's genocidal attacks on Gaza, and where big data tech companies contributing data storage and AI capabilities to Israel's military systems are based.

Similarly, 'responsible AI in the military domain' (surely an oxymoron) is being promoted by states already developing their own AI targeting and autonomous weapon systems, as a way of undermining the push towards a binding instrument to prohibit these critical threats to international peace and security.

The US 'Political Declaration on Responsible Military Use of Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy' has highlighted for us the risk of horizontal proliferation of both military use of AI and autonomous weapon systems as states that do not have their own capability in this regard move from interoperability to integration with the states of armed forces that do or that are developing it. In the case of New Zealand, for example - as it seeks to be a 'combat capable force multiplier with enhanced lethality'¹ - this involves closer military integration with the armed forces of Australia and the US: New Zealand endorsed the US 'Political Declaration' early last year specifically to be compliant with US military doctrine.

These unfortunate developments underscore the urgent need for a new international instrument on military AI and autonomy in weapon systems to clarify and strengthen existing law. The instrument must include both prohibitions and regulations, as outlined below, and must include military use of AI in combat.

As emphasised in the UN Secretary-General's 2024 report on autonomous weapon systems², negotiations on a new instrument must begin without any further delay, in a multilateral forum where states can come together to work constructively, where the voices of those whose lives have already been impacted by military use of AI and increasing autonomy in weapon systems can be heard, and where UN agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and NGOs are active participants.

b) Key focuses of a new international instrument

While much of the work around military use of AI and autonomous weapon systems has focused on the issue of meaningful human control over the use of force, it is our view that the key underlying ethical imperative is preventing human beings from being targeted or attacked by any system utilising digital code and/or sensors. A prohibition on military use of AI and autonomy in weapons systems that are designed or used to target human beings must be the starting point.

Meaningful human control over the use of force clearly has an ethical component, but it is also a practical and legal means to ensure accountability for any autonomy in weapon systems that breach the key dictates of humanitarian law.

c) Scope of a new international instrument

It is our view that a new international instrument should include overarching rules to establish a framework for evaluating current and future technological developments, while promoting increased compliance with international human rights and humanitarian law.

Such overarching rules would prohibit autonomous weapon systems that are designed or used to target humans, and lay out specific obligations to ensure meaningful human control over other systems: for example, that the human operator/s understand the capabilities and limitations of the system, are able to fully evaluate the context in which the system will be used, and are making mindful firing decisions rather than assuming the technology is accurate - this would act to regulate autonomy in weapon systems. It would be useful to specify that decisions made by states on their assessment of new or altered weapon systems that incorporate autonomous features or functions must be transparent.

Furthermore, in the context of the UN Secretary-General's forthcoming report on AI in the military domain and in the light of the awful consequences of military use of AI in Gaza, the scope of a new international instrument must go beyond autonomous weapon systems. It is very clear that there is a spectrum of harmful military use of autonomy, ranging from target decision support systems (as some have described systems such as Lavender), data-based targeting systems, generation of target lists by algorithm or AI, sensor-based targeting systems, through to weapon systems that combine these elements and incorporate varying degrees of machine learning to make target selection decisions and attack autonomously.

We note the 2023 Joint Call by the UN Secretary-General and ICRC President stated "*The autonomous targeting of humans by machines is a moral line that we must not cross*"³, yet that has already happened - a point reiterated in the UN Secretary-General's 2024 report⁴.

It is therefore our view that a new instrument must cover military use of AI - including systems that automate significant decision-making in the use of force, such as target generation, force deployment, and engagement - as well as autonomous weapon systems.

Finally, although we have referred in this submission to military use of AI and autonomy in weapon systems, prohibitions and regulations in a new international instrument must also apply to all coercive agencies of the state, including those used for policing and internal security, for border control, in corrections facilities and in places of detention.

¹ See, for example, the 2025 Defence Capability Plan released this week

² Lethal autonomous weapons systems: Report of the Secretary-General (A/79/88), 1 July 2024

³ Joint call by the United Nations Secretary-General and the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross for States to establish new prohibitions and restrictions on Autonomous Weapon Systems, 5 October 2023

⁴ As at note 3