



## **Submission to the United Nations Secretary-General on “Artificial intelligence in the military domain and its implications for international peace and security”**

The Stop Killer Robots campaign welcomes the opportunity to submit our views to the United Nations Secretary-General in response to Resolution A/RES/79/239.

Established in 2012, we are a coalition of more than 270 non-governmental organisations working across 70 countries.<sup>1</sup> We seek to counter threats to humanity and human dignity through the adoption of a new international treaty to prohibit and regulate autonomous weapons systems.<sup>2</sup> We support the development of legal and other norms that ensure meaningful human control over the use of force, counter digital dehumanisation, and reduce automated harm.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Building an effective international response to emerging technologies***

Autonomous weapons systems, ‘AI in the military domain,’ and trends and developments in increasingly automated decision-making and action in the use of force - as well as in our lives and societies more broadly - are all part of the same concerning picture:

The growing influence of computer processing and algorithmic thinking increasingly shapes our interactions in the world and the outcomes available to us. There are clear threats to peace, justice, dignity, human rights, equality, responsibility and accountability, and respect for law. We are getting closer to machine processes determining whom to kill.

To address these challenges effectively, a comprehensive and holistic response is needed from the international community.

Adopting a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons systems will be one critical component: we must draw basic red lines for humanity against the automation of killing, which brings under jeopardy both international humanitarian law and international human rights law, in particular the presumption of innocence, the right to equality and non-discrimination, dignity, and wipes away contextual circumstances of the target(s) in question. The UN Secretary-General’s comprehensive report last year reiterated his urgent call on states to negotiate a legally binding instrument to prohibit and regulate these systems by 2026.

But, a new international treaty on autonomous weapons systems alone may not be enough. States must also reach agreement on preventing and addressing grave harm from other uses of emerging technologies. A whole set of strong international rules are needed that stop the

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.stopkillerrobots.org/about-us](http://www.stopkillerrobots.org/about-us) and [www.stopkillerorobts.org/a-global-push/member-organisations](http://www.stopkillerorobts.org/a-global-push/member-organisations)

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/our-policies/>

<sup>3</sup> See [www.stopkillerrobots.org/vision-and-values/](http://www.stopkillerrobots.org/vision-and-values/)

erosion of meaningful human control and the slide towards greater digital dehumanisation and automated harm, across international and domestic practice, in armed conflict and in civilian life.

### ***‘Military applications of AI’ are already contributing to civilian harm***

The risks of integrating AI into the use of force in armed conflict reach far beyond those to peace and security between states: a holistic consideration of peace and security that considers dimensions such as ethical, legal, and humanitarian issues must be taken into account in the UN Secretary-General’s report under resolution 79/239.

We are already seeing grave threats to civilian protection and human rights and huge harm being caused by AI and automation in the use of force. This is arising from the quest for speed in warfare, the reduction of people to objects, and issues such as automation bias that Stop Killer Robots has raised the alarm about for years.

We have been horrified by reports of the use of AI-powered ‘decision support systems’ by Israel in Gaza, which suggest human targets to strike.<sup>4</sup> According to reports, human approval of these suggestions in vast volumes at high speed has been minimal - entailing digital dehumanisation, the erosion of meaningful human decision-making and control (including through automation bias), and directly contributing to massive and devastating harm to civilians in Gaza, alongside other tools.<sup>5</sup>

Many other states are developing and using such ‘decision support systems’, which raise concerns around international humanitarian law, human rights law, and ethics. So far there are few reports on how these are being deployed, with what constraints and with what impacts. Nevertheless, the push by many states to develop and integrate AI and autonomy into decision-making and the use of force is a huge concern. The further use in hostilities of these kinds of tools by any state in the unacceptable ways that we have seen in Gaza must be prevented. Stop Killer Robots struggles to see how such uses could meet the definition of the responsible application of AI in the military domain given in resolution 79/239.

### ***Further risks to peace and security, rights, and human dignity***

The quest for greater speed through AI and automation - towards the goal of increasing the tempo of conflict to a point beyond human cognition in the pursuit of a military and strategic edge - is an extremely dangerous one for international peace and security. These risks are further to the impact ‘AI in the military domain’ is already having on civilian protection. Risks include unwanted escalation, lowered political thresholds to the use of force, and arms race dynamics.

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Lavender’: The AI machine directing Israel’s bombing spree in Gaza, +972 Magazine  
<https://www.972mag.com/lavender-ai-israeli-army-gaza/>

<sup>5</sup> Questions and Answers: Israeli Military’s Use of Digital Tools in Gaza, Human Rights Watch,  
<https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/09/10/questions-and-answers-israeli-militarys-use-digital-tools-gaza>

Technologies that can contribute to target selection (such as threat detection tools) and remote biometric surveillance (such as facial recognition) have already had documented negative impacts on human rights such as the rights to privacy, equality and non-discrimination, freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, and the freedom of movement. In the case of facial recognition for identification (1:n), the technology is considered by many legal experts as wholly incompatible with international human rights law.

That AI systems inevitably encode and reproduce the biases of our societies - including racism, sexism and ableism - and that such bias cannot be eliminated, is also well established. The use of such systems to process people in the use of force will inevitably lead to disproportionate - and multiplied - impacts on already marginalised and minoritised people. Integrating automation and AI into decisions and actions in the use of force against people contributes to digital dehumanisation - the process where humans are reduced to data, which is then used to make decisions and/or take actions that negatively affects their lives.

### ***The relationship with autonomous weapons systems***

Stop Killer Robots notes that the UN Secretary-General's report will be on the “application of artificial intelligence in the military domain, with specific focus on areas other than lethal autonomous weapons systems.” It is important nevertheless to highlight that various applications beyond the boundary of autonomous weapons systems are closely linked to them.

Firstly, such tools could be integrated as components of autonomous weapons systems now or in the future. For example, a ‘decision support system’ could be used as an autonomous targeting system, connected to a platform tasked to strike targets on the list generated, based on processing sensor data. Secondly, these tools are linked not only practically, but raise and are part of the same picture of concern. Strikes undertaken based on the nominal human approval of targets generated by a decision support system do not sit far from strikes undertaken with an autonomous weapons system.

It is therefore important that states consider these issues in dialogue: many of the rules and principles developed for autonomous weapons systems on keeping control and rejecting automated killing will need to be extended (with adaptations) to other tools; and, how the development of AI in the military domain more broadly will impact the direction and challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems will need consideration.

### ***Recommendations***

Technologies incorporating AI and automation into the use of force in armed conflict are currently being deployed without specific agreed rules; the principles various states have proposed and committed to so far have been too weak and vague to prevent civilian harm and risks to peace and security.

All developments in autonomy and AI in the use of force which threaten our safety, security, and humanity must be urgently and adequately addressed through strong regulation by the international community, with unacceptable uses prevented.

States must:

- Move with urgency to negotiate and adopt a new international treaty to prohibit and regulate autonomous weapons systems;
- In International discussions, critically and meaningfully engage with the implications and real-world consequences of current practice in the use of tools that fall under 'AI in the military domain,' including acknowledging and examining humanitarian harm;
- Fully consider the legal, ethical, humanitarian, and peace and security risks of further development and use of such systems, whatever the perceived 'benefits' may be
- Work urgently to prevent unacceptable uses of technology and trends in development, through committing to develop strong norms for meaningful human control and against digital dehumanisation:
  - This should take place domestically, regionally, and internationally.
  - It must involve a comprehensive and holistic international response, including a legally binding instrument prohibiting and regulating autonomous weapons systems alongside other measures.
  - It should include consideration and development of the other legal instruments necessary to preserve meaningful human control and to protect human dignity against AI in the use of force.