

Joint Civil Society Statement on Armed Drones

UN General Assembly First Committee on Disarmament and International Security

17 October 2025

Delivered by Roos Boer (PAX) on behalf of 19 organisations

Honorable Chair, distinguished delegates,

Across today's battlefields and beyond, the skies have become theatres of fear. Armed drones are deployed by state and non-state actors alike – not only as tactical tools of war but increasingly as weapons of terror against civilians. Their persistent and expanding use in conflicts from Ukraine and Sudan to Gaza and Myanmar is emblematic of a dangerous global arms race with no guardrails.

Yet, little is done to prevent their misuse, as evidenced by notorious developments since last year's First Committee. In July 2025 alone, Russia launched over 6,000 Shahed drones into Ukraine, killing civilians and destroying residential areas, while commercial weaponized drones have been used to hunt down civilians in a deliberate terror campaign. In Sudan, drone strikes have targeted displacement camps and critical infrastructure, worsening an already dire humanitarian crisis. In Gaza, drones have been used to drop grenades on civilians, including children.

Even outside of active battlefields, such as in Ethiopia, Somalia, Syria or in Latin America, extrajudicial drone killings persist, resulting in civilian deaths with impunity. Drone attacks by non-State actors with resulting civilian deaths or injuries also remain a serious concern, particularly, in Central Africa, Colombia and Haiti.

These are not isolated incidents – they are signs of the failure of the international community to govern armed violence and to prevent the erosion of international norms.

Even worse, dual-use technologies and commercial components are being weaponised with ease. Armed groups and states can bypass conventional arms control frameworks, importing drone parts under civilian pretexts and assembling them into instruments of war. Civilian and military drone technologies are blending, further obscuring lines of accountability and control.

Chair,

Despite years of concerns being raised by civil society, subject matter experts, and UN bodies, the world still lacks an international framework for the regulation of armed drones. This regulatory vacuum is enabling a culture of impunity – and it is civilians who pay the price.

The First Committee must not allow this issue to remain on the margins of multilateral disarmament efforts. The time for meaningful international engagement is now.

We therefore urge Member States to:

- Condemn the use of drones for extrajudicial killings or as a means to terrorize civilians, and reaffirm international legal frameworks that prohibit such practices;
- Investigate with transparency any civilian harm from drone deployment and ensure victims' access to justice; and
- Strengthen export control regimes for military drones' transfers and use, and explore multilateral approaches to addressing issues around dual-use parts, components and other technologies relevant for production of military-capable drones.

Chair,

During last year's First Committee, we welcomed renewed momentum from the Core Group of States calling for dedicated multilateral discussions on armed drones. But these calls must be turned into concrete action. We call on States to initiate an inclusive policy process that delivers clear, robust, and binding international standards on armed drones. This is an issue that cannot be resolved by States working alone or even in small coalitions – it requires a truly multilateral response in collaboration with civil society, academics and survivors.

The failure of the international community to agree on how to address the uncontrolled proliferation and use of armed drones, despite the obvious need, is undermining trust in the very concept of multilateralism to solve today's problems. We urge Member States to rise to the urgency of this moment and take decisive action to curb rampant drone violence, safeguarding civilians and bolstering international peace and security.

This statement has been endorsed by:

- Action on Armed Violence (AOAV)
- Article 36
- Campaign Against Arms Trade
- Campaña Colombiana Contra Minas
- Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos
- DAWN
- Derechos de la Infancia y la Adolescencia
- International Peace Research Association
- Nonviolence International
- Nonviolence International Canada
- PAX
- Perú por el Desarme
- Project Ploughshares
- Saferworld
- Scientists for Global Responsibility (SGR)
- SEHLAC
- Vision GRAM-International
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- Women for Peace and Democracy Nepal