1) The Government of the Republic of Fiji welcomes the opportunity to submit its views and recommendations for the consideration of the United Nations Secretary-General in response to Resolution 78/241 on “Lethal autonomous weapons systems” adopted by the UN General Assembly on 22 December 2023. The resolution requests input from countries and stakeholders on “ways to address the challenges and concerns raised” by such weapons systems “from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives.”

Challenges and Concerns

2) As a Pacific Small Island Developing State, we are deeply concerned about the serious ethical, moral, legal, accountability, environmental and security issues associated with autonomous weapons, particularly as they affect countries in the Global South and the Pacific. The development and use of autonomous weapons systems poses significant risks that must be addressed urgently.

3) Autonomous weapons systems endanger both civilians and combatants, potentially escalating conflicts in unpredictable ways. These systems challenge compliance with international law, including international humanitarian law. The rules governing the conduct of hostilities and the protection of civilians may be undermined by the use of machines making life and death decisions. This substitution of human judgement with machine processes raises fundamental ethical concerns.

4) There is a clear danger of these weapons proliferating globally, being accessed by non-state actors, and used for criminal activities. The Pacific Islands, with their unique vulnerabilities, make this a major concern. The risk of autonomous weapons falling into the hands of non-state actors is particularly alarming, as it could lead to increased instability and violence.
5) Historically, military technologies have caused lasting environmental damages. The development and use of autonomous weapons would likely continue this trend. The automation of violence reduces human oversight over the consequences of weapons use, potentially leading to significant environmental harm. There is mounting evidence that training artificial intelligence and machine learning models carries significant carbon footprints. The potential energy cost of training and operating autonomous weapons systems is a concern, with studies indicating that training artificial intelligence could substantially contribute to climate change. At a time when reducing carbon emissions is a global priority, the development and use of autonomous weapons could further degrade our planet.

6) Algorithmic bias in autonomous weapons systems is a major concern, especially for historically marginalised populations. These systems could perpetuate racial, gender, and other biases, leading to disproportionate harm to these groups. The reliance on data from sensors to apply force can embed systemic prejudices into the decision-making processes of autonomous weapons. Evidence from civilian applications of AI, such as policing and criminal sentencing, shows that marginalised populations are disproportionately affected by algorithmic bias.

7) The issue of accountability is also critical. Responsibility for the actions of autonomous weapons cannot be easily assigned to human operators, as they do not have direct control over when, where, and against whom the weapons apply force. In the context of armed conflict, where the fog of war already complicates accountability, autonomous weapons would further undermine efforts to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. This lack of accountability would make it even more difficult to provide justice to victims.

8) Moreover, allowing machines to take human life dehumanises individuals, reducing them to data points processed by sensors and algorithms. This mechanisation of violence undermines human dignity and ethical principles.

Addressing These Challenges

9) To address these challenges, we call for the immediate start of negotiations for a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons. This instrument should enforce:

- Prohibitions on weapons systems that would target people;
- Prohibitions on weapons systems that cannot be used with meaningful human control;
- Regulations on all other weapons systems to ensure they are effectively controlled, understood and limit the area and duration of their use;
● Include regulations to prevent the proliferation and unauthorised use of autonomous weapons;
● Address environmental impacts and ensure militaries are held accountable for carbon emission with immediate and appropriate remediation both to the environment and peoples lives;

10) The General Assembly is the ideal forum for these negotiations, ensuring diverse and inclusive representation. The Assembly’s membership includes states from all corners of the globe, ensuring that the views of small and developing nations are heard. At the same time, we recognise it is useful to continue dialogue in all appropriate multilateral fora as they can be mutually reinforcing. It is time to step outside of that forum to one that can aim higher, move faster, and be more inclusive of countries that are not party to the CCW as well as of international organisations and civil society. Existing international humanitarian law is inadequate to address the challenges posed by autonomous weapons.

11) We stand with the 109 states supporting a legally binding instrument to address the issues of autonomous weapons. In the Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, Antonio Guterres urgently calls on states to adopt a treaty to prohibit and regulate autonomous weapons systems by 2026. In October 2023, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and President of the International Committee of the Red Cross Mirjana Spoljaric called on states to “urgently establish new international rules on autonomous weapons systems, to protect humanity.”

12) We are grateful for the opportunity to share our views and recommendations on addressing this grave threat to humanity. It is imperative that the international community acts swiftly and decisively to establish robust legal frameworks that prevent the proliferation and misuse of autonomous weapons systems. Protecting human dignity, ensuring accountability, and safeguarding the environment must be at the forefront of these efforts including their appropriate remediation to human lives and the environment. The future of global peace and security depends on our collective action against the unchecked development and deployment of autonomous weapons.

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