

Human Rights Watch
Statement on Lethal Autonomous Weapons System to the CCW Annual Meeting
Delivered by Mary Wareham, Advocacy Director, Arms Division
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Thank you, Chair.

Human Rights Watch and the Harvard Law School International Human Rights Clinic have released a 40-page report entitled “[An Agenda for Action](#),” which proposes that countries initiate a treaty-making process to safeguard humanity from autonomous weapons systems.

Delegating life-and-death decisions to machines crosses a moral line, as they would be incapable of appreciating the value of human life and respecting human dignity. The loss of meaningful human control over the use of force also poses legal, accountability, and security threats.

Our new report shows how a handful of major military powers have repeatedly blocked proposals in the CCW to negotiate new international law that would address mounting concerns over autonomous weapons systems.

Such an agreement is feasible and achievable. More than 70 countries see [an urgent need](#) for “internationally agreed rules and limits” on autonomous weapons systems. This objective has strong support from scientists, faith leaders, military veterans, industry, and Nobel Peace laureates.

There’s now much greater understanding among governments of the essential elements of the legal framework needed to address this issue. There is strong recognition that [a new international treaty](#) should prohibit autonomous weapons systems that inherently lack meaningful human control or that target people. The treaty should also ensure that other weapons systems should never be used without meaningful human control.

Past humanitarian disarmament models provide valuable lessons for alternative processes for negotiating a new treaty on killer robots. The processes could be independent, that is take place outside of the UN, or initiated by the UN General Assembly.

Our new report identifies four characteristics of these alternative processes that are particularly conducive to achieving strong treaties in a timely fashion: a common purpose; voting-based decision-making; clear and ambitious deadlines; and a commitment to inclusivity.

The longer the killer robots issue stays stuck in the CCW forum, the more time developers of autonomous weapons systems have to hone new technologies and achieve commercial viability. A new treaty would help stem arms races and avoid proliferation by stigmatizing the removal of human control.

As a co-founder of the Stop Killer Robots campaign, Human Rights Watch fully supports [its call](#) for states to initiate a diplomatic process for a legal instrument prohibiting and regulating autonomous weapon systems.

Thank you.