

STATEMENT OF THE INTER-FAITH GROUP OF THE CAMPAIGN TO STOP KILLER ROBOTS, MAY 2023

In February 2023, members of the Stop Killer Robots coalition met in Costa Rica to consider the impact of digital dehumanisation - a process in which humans are reduced to data points, on which decisions are made which can negatively impact us. The potential of such automated harm includes injury or death from the use of autonomous weapon systems.

Digital dehumanisation is fundamentally repulsive to all people who share a belief in the inalienable dignity of the human person and the inestimable worth of human life. At the same meeting in Costa Rica, several civil society organisations and individuals representing a range of faiths and beliefs created an inter-faith group to further raise our voices and jointly condemn all attempts to allow the unregulated development of autonomous weapons.

Our different faith traditions teach a profound respect for life. Furthermore, many scientists who work in the field of artificial intelligence are largely in agreement with the faith-based conviction that machines will never have human consciousness or awareness, and will never experience human emotions such as empathy, compassion, love and hate. Accordingly, strengthening the moral threshold against delegating decisions about the life or death of people to machines operated by digital code is a core issue for us all.

We are all witnesses of war and armed conflict at present. The ledgers of injustice and impunity are growing. Weapons with more and more autonomy are being used to kill, injure and destroy, with technology being developed at an accelerating speed. Civil society, academics, scientists and others have been speaking out and advocating for several years about the urgent need to establish legally binding prohibitions and regulations on autonomous weapons to protect us all from this grave threat to humanity.

We welcome the growing awareness of this need, as evidenced by the large majority of states at the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) meetings who are in favor of negotiating a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons. We welcome the affirmation by many states that meaningful human control must be retained over such technologies. We also welcome the positions of all states and international organizations calling for specific prohibitions on systems which would target humans. However, we believe that these very positive positions cannot be fully asserted and implemented without the development and universal acceptance of a global regulatory framework, but despite 10 years of work at the CCW, little practical progress has been made.

We therefore continue to call on the UN member states and all people of goodwill shaping policy in this field to establish and protect meaningful human control over the use of force by weapons with limited autonomy through regulation, and to enact and enforce a global ban on autonomous weapons that target people or cannot be used with meaningful human control.

The following organisations endorse this statement:

Aotearoa New Zealand Stop Killer Robots Campaign

Christian World Service, Aotearoa New Zealand

Fellowship of Reconciliation (England and Scotland)

Hungary Stop Killer Robots Campaign

Institute of Church and Society, Ibadan, Nigeria

Kairos Foundation of Nigeria

New Zealand Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, Aotearoa New Zealand

Pax Christi Aotearoa, New Zealand

Pax Christi International

Peace Movement Aotearoa, New Zealand

Soka Gakkai International

St Andrew's on the Terrace Presbyterian Church, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand

Sustainable Peace and Development Organization (SPADO)

The InterAgency Institute

World Council of Churches