



CAIDP Update 2.44 (Dec. 23, 2021) – UN Fails to Act on “Slaughter Bots”

Almost 40 years ago, the United Nations adopted a convention to limit the use of certain weapons. Since that time, the [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons](#) has been routinely updated to restrict or prohibit particularly inhumane weapons such as land mines, incendiary devices, and bioweapons. In 2016, the UN established a group of experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) to discuss options for addressing the human rights, humanitarian, ethical and security challenges posed by fully autonomous weapons systems.

AI experts, the international Red Cross and several NGOs, have also urged a ban on autonomous weapons, such as “slaughterbots” that often rely on AI techniques. Concerns about autonomous weapons have been raised by world-renowned scientists and global leaders, including Stephen Hawking, Mag Texmark, Bill Gates, Elon Musk, and Pope Francis. ([CAIDP Update 1.20](#)). The effort to “[Stop Killer Robots](#)” gained force in 2021 after a [UN report](#) found that autonomous drones, manufactured in Turkey, were likely used in the Libyan civil war to track and kill retreating soldiers.

And so delegates gathered at a UN meeting in Geneva in December 2021 to update the Convention were expected to begin work on international treaty or framework principles to limit the use of autonomous weapons. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called for “an ambitious plan for the future to establish restrictions on the use of certain types of autonomous weapons.”

But no action was taken by the United Nations on autonomous weapons, other than to agree to future discussion. According to [one report](#), Russia, India and the United States were among the countries who expressed doubts about the need for a new LAWS treaty.

In a [February 2021 statement](#) to the National Security Commission on AI, CAIDP objected to the decision of the US Commission to oppose a global prohibition on autonomous weapons. CAIDP wrote, “Although the CAIDP has not yet considered Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) as a formal criteria in evaluating national AI policies and practices, our recent review of country policies strongly indicates support among democratic nations for limits on these systems.” CAIDP reiterated these concerns about the US AI Commission report in a [March 2021 statement](#) to Members of the House Armed Services Committee.

CAIDP also [proposed](#) to the Council of Europe expert group on AI that limitations on autonomous weapons could be established in a Council of Europe Treaty on AI. “As the protection of human rights remains within the Council’s mandate, we recommend a prohibition of AI-enabled autonomous weapon systems that implicate human rights,” wrote CAIDP.