



**CAMPAIGN TO STOP  
KILLER ROBOTS**

# STOP KILLER ROBOTS ACTIVISM TOOLKIT

Working together to ban fully autonomous weapons

## INTRODUCTION

Formed in October 2012, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots is a global coalition of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academics and tech workers that is working to ban fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the power to make life-and-death decisions.

In the UK, 15 organisations have come together to form the UK Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. Globally, the campaign works with over 165 organisations, in 65 countries.

## WHAT ARE KILLER ROBOTS?

Killer robots are weapon systems that would automatically select and attack targets without meaningful human control. **This means the decision to kill would be made by a machine.** This far-reaching development would fundamentally change the way war is conducted and has been called the third revolution in warfare, after gunpowder and the atomic bomb.

The function of autonomously selecting and attacking targets could be applied to various platforms, for instance a battle tank, a fighter jet or a ship. There is also wide-ranging concern that this technology could also find its way into policing, law enforcement and other security operations.

Another term used to describe these weapons is lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS).

## OVERVIEW

This campaign aims to pre-emptively ban the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapon systems or killer robots. Fundamental legal, moral, technical, security and other concerns are raised by allowing machines to select and attack targets without human intervention. There is now widespread agreement about the need to retain some form of human control over future weapon systems.

Yet states have made little progress towards achieving an outcome and time is running out. Military powers such as Israel, Russia, China, South Korea, the UK and the US have explicitly rejected proposals to prohibit or regulate lethal autonomous weapon systems. Unless constraints are put in place, LAWS will be deployed in the coming years rather than decades.

**Campaigns like this have won before!** A new treaty to stop killer robots is urgently needed and a ban is achievable. Genuine partnerships between like-minded countries, UN agencies and NGOs have resulted in humanitarian disarmament treaties before. Take for example the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons via the UN General Assembly, the Arms Trade Treaty agreed in 2014 or the treaties to ban cluster bombs in 2008 and anti-personnel landmines, in 1997.

Working out a diplomatic pathway requires starting from the bottom up, which is why the campaign to Stop Killer Robots needs student activists!

## HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

Killer robots pose serious human rights concerns and accountability problems. The use of fully autonomous weapons threatens to violate both international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and could be used both in armed conflict and a range of other policing and security operations. This is because machines are not equipped to distinguish between soldiers and civilians, or between military objectives and civilian objects such as homes and schools.

Neither can they weigh the proportionality of an attack or judge a situation and its context in the same way humans can. The principles of humanity require respect for the dignity and inherent worth of human life. As inanimate machines, fully autonomous weapons cannot truly understand the value of a life and the significance of its loss.

There is also concern for individual accountability for unlawful acts committed by fully autonomous weapons, as robots themselves cannot be held responsible under the law. Holding a person liable for such crimes would be nearly impossible in most cases, violating the right to a remedy for the victims of human rights abuses.

Once developed, lethal autonomous weapons may be relatively cheap to produce and simple to copy especially machine learning systems and computerized algorithms. This increases the



likelihood of their proliferation to a wide variety of actors, including dictators, non-state actors and other human rights abusers.

Even state actors would likely to resort to using killer robots to resolve conflict - removing the need to send human soldiers makes the use of robotic weapons relatively 'risk-free'. Disincentivising political resolution of disputes in this way would lower the threshold to war. The development of LAWS could also trigger an arms race between states. The combined effect of these points would be to threaten international peace and security.

## **WHY A UNIVERSITY CAMPAIGN?**

Universities have a central role in stopping the production of killer robots. University departments are likely to be at the forefront of research into robotic weaponry and artificial intelligence. Universities also help to shape societies by training future generations, passing on knowledge and driving innovation.

Several defence companies have well established and active research programmes with UK universities in those fields. These institutions must safeguard their innovations to prevent them from being used in inhumane technology such as lethal autonomous weapons.

## **OVERALL CAMPAIGN GOAL**

The campaign aims to establish a legally binding treaty which ensures meaningful human control is retained over the use of all weapons systems, prohibiting the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons to ensure that life and death decisions can never be delegated to a machine.

To succeed, we must find politicians willing to press the government to act and propose national laws to ban killer robots. Creating pressure on political leaders requires leveraging media interest, promoting the cause on social media and spreading the word far and wide.

Students and universities must raise their voices if we are to achieve our goal of a treaty banning killer robots.

## **UNIVERSITY CAMPAIGN GOALS**

We are asking Amnesty International student groups across the UK to join the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, with the following asks for their universities:

1. Universities commit publicly to not contribute to the development of killer robots.
2. Universities must establish a clear policy stating that the university will not contribute to the development or production of lethal autonomous weapons systems and include implementation measures for the policy.
3. Universities must ensure staff and researchers are fully aware of the precise use and implications of the technology they are producing
4. Institutions, departments and individual academics should sign the 'Future of Life – Lethal Autonomous Weapons Pledge' <https://futureoflife.org/lethal-autonomous-weapons-pledge>

# CAMPAIGNING ONLINE AND ON CAMPUS

## Quick and easy online actions

- Follow the UK Campaign to Stop Killer Robots on Twitter @uk\_robots and Instagram @ukstopkillerrobots
- Follow the Global Campaign to Stop Killer Robots on Twitter @BanKillerRobots
- Use the hashtag #StopKillerRobots when sharing infographics on social media

## Actions for student groups

- Ask your faculty or department to sign the 'Lethal Autonomous Weapons Pledge'
- Send an email to your university asking them to consider signing the pledge and implement measures to ban the development of killer robots on campus
- Organise an event or petition on campus to educate fellow students about killer robots
- Look into your university research programmes and partnerships with A.I., military or tech companies, as well as their code of ethics.

If your group is interested in getting involved with the Stop Killer Robots campaign get in touch with [leyla.manthorpe@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:leyla.manthorpe@amnesty.org.uk) and [sascha.pare@amnesty.org.uk](mailto:sascha.pare@amnesty.org.uk)

They are coordinating the campaign on behalf on the Student Action Network Committee and will be organising student planning calls for the campaign.

# RESOURCES

New York Times 'A.I. Is Making it Easier to Kill (You), Here's How':  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFD\\_Cgr2zho](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFD_Cgr2zho)

Visit the campaign website: [www.stopkillerrobots.org](http://www.stopkillerrobots.org), especially the 'Resources' and 'Recommended Reading' sections.

Visit the Reprogramming War website: [www.reprogrammingwar.org](http://www.reprogrammingwar.org)

'Army of None' by Paul Scharre: a book about a former soldiers and policy advisor to the US Department of Defense.

PAX 'Conflicted Intelligence' report on how universities can help prevent the development of killer robots: <https://www.paxforpeace.nl/publications/all-publications/conflicted-intelligence>

Campaign materials and infographics are available at  
<https://www.stopkillerrobots.org/resources/>

## Web Talks

CND UK with Peter Burt (Drone Wars UK), Verity Coyle (Campaign to Stop Killer Robots) Ian Chamberlain (CND) Kay Hudson (CND)  
<https://www.facebook.com/20795833032/videos/569925533945805>

Student and Young Pugwash UK webinar on the ethical, political and technical issues around lethal autonomous weapons  
<https://britishpugwash.org/video-killer-robots-syp-webinar/>