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Significant act of political and moral leadership as Latin American and Caribbean states issue a historic call for the urgent negotiation of international law on autonomy in weapons systems

On 24 February 2023, 33 states from Latin American and the Caribbean issued a historic call from the region for “the urgent negotiation of an international legally binding instrument on autonomy in weapons systems.” The communiqué was the result of a two day regional meeting on the social and humanitarian impacts of autonomous weapons. The conference was hosted by the Costa Rican government in San José and attended by governmental experts from Latin America and the Caribbean, the ICRC, UN agencies, academics and civil society.

Currently there is no specific international law to regulate the use or development of autonomous weapons. This legal gap needs to be addressed with urgency as the deployment of systems with autonomous capabilities has already been reported in Ukraine and Libya.

Diplomatic talks at the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) have failed to make discernible progress in developing legal rules on autonomy in weapons systems despite nearly a decade of discussions. A minority of highly militarised states including the US and Russia, already investing heavily in the development of autonomous technologies, have used the consensus rule within the CCW to block progress towards new law, despite 80-plus states supporting legislation.

The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres has called autonomous weapons “politically unacceptable and morally repugnant”. Thousands of tech and AI experts and scientists, the Stop Killer Robots campaign, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the ICRC, 26 Nobel Laureates and wider civil society have called for new international law to address autonomy in weapons systems and ensure meaningful human control over the use of force.

Isabelle Jones, Stop Killer Robots said:

“After the decade-long deadlock at the Convention on Conventional Weapons at the UN in Geneva, and weak proposals by the US and Dutch governments last week, the Latin American and Caribbean region has demonstrated the sort of political and moral leadership that is needed. It’s time for states to negotiate new international law to protect humanity against the killing of people by machines.”

“A clear majority of states see the need for a legal instrument that will regulate autonomy in weapons systems and ensure meaningful human control over the use of force. Diplomatic talks at the Convention on Conventional Weapons have failed time and time again to make progress. It’s now time to work in a different forum - where the majority cannot be blocked by a minority of states who are investing in the development of autonomous weapons.”

The Conference website can be found [here](#).

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