

**JOINT YOUTH SUBMISSION ON
AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS TO THE
UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL**
RE: ODA-2024-00019/LAWS

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*I dream of a future where technology contributes to
creating a more sustainable and harmonious society
rather than being a threat to us.*

- Hiba, 20, Pakistan

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The Stop Killer Robots Youth Network welcomes the opportunity to submit recommendations for consideration by the United Nations Secretary-General in response to Resolution 78/241 on “Lethal autonomous weapons systems” adopted by the UN General Assembly on 22 December 2023. Members of the Stop Killer Robots Youth Network conducted interviews with young people from around the world to inquire about their views on autonomous weapons and what their impacts would mean for young people today and in the future - their words and perspectives are reflected throughout this submission.

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The existence of autonomous weapons would mean we would be more disconnected with humanity. - **Sophie, 16, USA/Tajikistan/Tanzania**

As a global network of young people working to secure a future free of automated killing, we advocate for the creation of a new treaty on autonomous weapons systems (AWS) — in particular, we insist on a total prohibition of anti-personnel autonomous weapons as we wish to build a world without such dehumanising weapons. While youth will inevitably face the risks of new weapons technologies, we remain underrepresented in the decision-making process and are often sidelined in forums that shape our interests. With escalating conflicts and the rapid deployment of new weapons technologies around the world, there is an urgent need to reinvest in international law as a measure to build trust and achieve sustainable peace and security.

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I worry about autonomous weapons causing harm without human control, leading to more conflicts. - **Jefferson, 25, Ghana**

Youth are disproportionately affected by armed conflicts. In 2022, one in six children was living in armed conflict (1) and must continue to live with the horrendous consequences of these events (2). Children can be direct or indirect victims of attacks from means and methods that are not intended to be used on children (3). In addition, critical infrastructures necessary for the development of children and youth are being destroyed or disrupted in current armed conflicts (4), sometimes intentionally. As the means and methods of warfare have evolved over time, recently, with the evolution of automated decision-making in acts of war, civilians have been increasingly impacted by these new means and methods (5). In Gaza, where artificial intelligence systems have allegedly been used to identify targets, 40% of civilian casualties have been children (6). With this in mind, we, as youth, are progressively apprehensive about the development of AWS. Since 1945, generations have grown up under the fear of being killed by nuclear weapons (7). Let us safeguard future generations from growing under the fear of being killed by AWS.

¹ ICRC, *Childhood in Rubble : The Humanitarian Consequence of Urban Warfare for Children*, p. 7, Geneva, May 2023.

² Save the Children, *Children in Conflicts*, <https://data.stopwaronchildren.org/>.

³ ICRC, *Childhood in Rubble : The Humanitarian Consequence of Urban Warfare for Children*, pp. 26-27, Geneva, May 2023.

⁴ UNICEF, *Water Under Fire Volume 3, Attacks on water and sanitation services in armed conflicts and the impact on children*, New York, 2021. Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, *Attacks on Education and Military Use of Education Facilities in Ukraine in 2022*, February 2023.

⁵ International Campaign to Ban Landmines — Cluster Munition Coalition, *Landmine monitor 2023*, Geneva, November 2023, p.55.

⁶ United Nations, *Two Third of Gaza War Dead are Women and Children, Briefer Says, as Security Council Debates Their Plights*, 22 November 2023, <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15503.doc.htm>.

⁷ S. J. Kiraly, *Psychological Effects Of The Threat of Nuclear War*, *Can Fam Physician*, January 1986; n°32, pp. 170-174.

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*If a human makes a mistake, there would be consequences for them.
 But, a killer robot, well, nothing will happen.* - **Juline, 16, Belgium**

AWS will decrease the threshold of conflict, which has been low for decades, and they could even cause their escalation. AWS, if developed, will be acquired by armed and terrorist groups as has been the case with almost all conventional weapons (8). These are only a fraction of all the issues which AWS will create. Action has to be taken immediately. States, leaders, and citizens need to act now to stop the development of AWS and other means aimed at killing, maiming, and dehumanising people.

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Conflicts in recent years are escalating rapidly as never before, and this can be attributed in part to the misuse and proliferation of advanced technology and development of increasingly lethal weapons systems.
 - **Maria, 23, Lebanon**

Current international conflicts have significantly strained youth confidence in international governance, fostering a sense of disillusionment and frustration. The continuous disregard for international law and human rights and a perceived lack of consequences for such actions have left many feeling hopeless and without adequate international representation or protection.

Vulnerable young people in conflict zones, who often bear the brunt of these incidents, find themselves in a particularly precarious position, with limited involvement in the creation of the conflicts that unfold around them. However, the prevailing trends of marginalisation and discrimination against vulnerable youth are likely to worsen with the advent of an autonomous weapons arms race.

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Just the fact that you even think about creating these kinds of weapons is a problem. - **Daniela, 26, Italy**

Should international discussions continue to stall, a new catastrophic arms race may very well be underway. Autonomous weapons systems are a looming disaster in a world increasingly losing its sense of shared humanity. The United Nations stands at a pivotal moment with both an opportunity and an obligation to ensure that these detrimental trends do not persist unchecked. Ultimately, young people will bear the brunt of inaction, both now and in the future. Today, we can take action to prevent the further development and use of other inhumane weapon systems, with a new international treaty on autonomous weapons.

Weapons systems with varying levels of autonomy (9) are already impacting the lives of those impacted by armed conflict (10) — these weapons are no longer a future problem. Countries are racing ahead to field these capabilities and in reality, we are only a few software updates away from machines making life-and-death decisions (11). We are already witnessing the problematic effects of automated decision making and artificial intelligence resulting in ethical issues, including digital dehumanisation, and a lack of compliance with international humanitarian law.

⁸ Arms Trade Treaty, preamble, 2 April 2013.

⁹ Automated Decision Research, Autonomous weapon and digital dehumanisation, November 2022, p.3.

¹⁰ +972 Magazine, ‘Lavender’: The AI machine directing Israel’s bombing spree in Gaza, 3 April 2024.

¹¹ Automated Decision Research, “Weapons systems”, automatedresearch.org, n.d.
<https://automatedresearch.org/weapons-systems/>

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Young people like me should be able to live in a world free from the fear of being turned into numbers and data. - Hevelyn, 24, Brazil

Planet Earth and its inhabitants are precious, we must all invest our time and energy to protect them. Technology should be used to promote peace and human rights, not for the creation of dehumanising weapons. What if we could create Autonomous Demining Systems to help communities impacted by landmines? The Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention should be a source of inspiration for us at this moment – 25 years ago, the international community agreed upon the ban of anti-personnel landmines, an inhumane weapon which also had disproportionate impacts on children and future generations (12). Sadly, the ban on these weapons came only after their extensive use around the world, leading to circumstances where we have - and will continue - to deal with the consequences of anti-personnel landmines.

We urge states and leaders to act now, to stop the development of AWS and other means aimed at killing and dehumanising people. We have the unique opportunity to act before catastrophe occurs. We appeal to everyone — States, leaders, and citizens to work for the dawning of peace and tolerance that is much needed today.

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Reaching a treaty on autonomous weapons would signify the beginning of a new era for international cooperation and disarmament. - Valeria, 22 Costa Rica

Using the United Nations and international law as a beacon of hope, we look to global institutions to advocate for justice and protect the most vulnerable among us. We rely on global leaders to uphold ethical standards, as highlighted throughout this submission, emphasizing the imperative of meaningful human control over weapons.

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A comprehensive treaty would mean that the voices of those who are and would be most affected by these weapons were heard and were taken seriously. It would reinvigorate my trust in the international multilateral system. - Deborah, 28, Sweden

¹² Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, Preamble, 18 September 1997

Organisational Signatories

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