



# Ethics and Handling of Drones and Self-Firing Weapon Systems

## Committee Guide

First Committee of the General Assembly (GA1st)

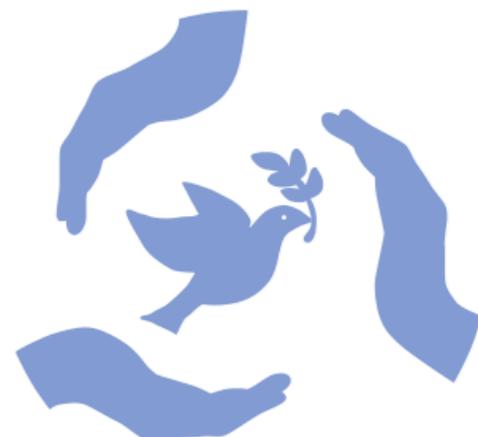
(Disarmament and Security Committee)



**Causes of Conflict**

**and**

**Proposals for Peace**



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## 1. Personal introductions:

Hi, my name is Keara. I am 19 years old and from Oldenburg. I am a student at the Cäcilien-schule Oldenburg and currently finishing my final exams so I will start studying at university in September. My MUN journey started at the OLMUN 2019 as a delegate. Since then, I have participated in several MUNs all over Germany. For me, gaining new experiences and getting to know other people from around the world is one of the main aspects of a MUN, besides having fun. I decided that I would really like to chair at OLMUN again, just like last year. I am very excited to be participating as a Chair for the second time at OLMUN 2022 and I look forward to many interesting debates. I wish you all the best for your preparation for the conference and I'm looking forward to seeing you in June.

I am Arik, 19-year-old student at the Cäcilien-schule Oldenburg. Like Keara I have my finals in April and May and afterwards I am probably going to study business informatics. I am very much into macroeconomics, but also drumming, gaming and calisthenics. I actually don't have a lot MUN experience since this will be my second MUN. Last year I participated at OLMUN as a delegate and really enjoyed it. However, this year I would like to see OLMUN from a different perspective, which is why I applied for a chair position. I am definitely looking forward to seeing you all in person. We will surely have interesting and valuable debates on the topic.

Hi, my name is Juliana Rashid and I recently turned 19. Currently I attend 12th grade at Graf-Anton-Günther-School. Last year I took part at the OLMUN (the ASEAN committee) as a delegate like Arik. It was a lot of fun to participate in political discussions. So, I am sure that you too will enjoy discussing with each other this year. I have experience of committee involvement: For example, I am part of the team of the study of the Federal Ministry for the Environment and the Federal Environment Agency. I hope to use my previous experience for chairing at the OLMUN, so that I can also contribute to a successful discussion. I am pleased to meet all of you and of course to be able to conduct a successful political discussion with you.

## 2. How to use this guide:

This Committee Guide will serve as an introduction to the topic. Accordingly, it is not meant to be used as an all-inclusive analysis for research, but rather the groundwork for your own analysis and research. Try to find other information about your country's past, present, cultural factors, political structure, you name it...

Another important thing to remember is that your opinion might not be similar to your country's opinion. For the sake of the debates, it is necessary that you stick to your country's policy. Each delegate is requested to submit a policy statement and a draft resolution prior to the conference (**May 31st, 2022**), which reflect your research on the topic. Please take note of the rules of procedure.



If you have problems formulating one of these, you will be able to find more detailed information about either one in the official handbook.

### 3. Committee introduction:

The First Committee of the General Assembly (GA 1st) is one of the main committees of the General Assembly. It was created along with five other subcommittees at the first session of the General Assembly in 1946. In general, the committee deals with international disarmament, security problems and other global challenges. Therefore, it is also known as the “Disarmament and Security Committee” or DISEC.

Its decisions are not legally binding but represent a strong self-commitment of the international community. Resolutions passed by the First Committee are forwarded to the plenary sessions of the General Assembly, where they are discussed further and adopted. All 193 member countries of the United Nations are represented in the GA 1st.

The history of the General Assembly and its main committees goes back to the founding days of the United Nations. While the name and priorities of the First Committee have seen changes over the years, it has always dealt with security-related issues. Disarmament, conflict prevention and stability are as relevant today as they were 73 years ago, when the UN was founded.

### 4. Important Definitions:

#### 4.1. Drones:

A drone is an unmanned aircraft. Drones are more formally known as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or unmanned aircraft systems. Essentially, a drone is a flying robot that can be remotely controlled or fly autonomously using software-controlled flight plans in its embedded systems, that work in conjunction with onboard sensors and global positioning system (GPS).

#### 4.2. Self-Firing Weapon System:

Self-Firing Weapon Systems, specifically known as lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), are weapons system that use artificial intelligence to identify, select, and kill human targets without human intervention.

Whereas drones are controlled by humans, LAWS' act solely based on algorithms.

#### 4.3. Ethics:

Ethics is based on well-founded standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues.

#### 4.4. Arms control:

Arms control is a term for international restrictions upon the development, production, stockpiling, proliferation and usage of small arms, conventional weapons, and weapons of mass destruction. Arms control is typically exercised through the use of diplomacy which seeks to



impose such limitations upon consenting participants through international treaties and agreements, although it may also comprise efforts by a nation or group of nations to enforce limitations upon a non-consenting country.

Arms control may be utilized to attain four goals:

1. The reduction of the possibility of war through imposing limits on weapons proliferation that may lead to destabilization or the occurrence of preventive offensives
2. The lessening of civilian suffering and the general destruction resulting from war
3. General cuts in expenditure on arms
4. The building of confidence and trust among states

#### 4.5. Disarmament:

Disarmament is the traditional term for the elimination, as well as the limitation or reduction (through negotiation of an international agreement), of the means by which nations wage war. The term arms control was coined in the 1950s to denote an international agreement to limit the arms race, in particular the nuclear arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, following recognition that general and complete nuclear disarmament would not be readily achieved. Arms control originally was meant to denote internationally agreed rules limiting the arms competition rather than reversing it; it had a connotation distinct from the reduction or elimination of armaments (i.e. disarmament). Indeed, the term “arms control” was not popular with a number of supporters of disarmament. Subsequently, however, the meaning of the term has become significantly broadened, and is now commonly used to denote international agreements which are intended to:

- freeze, limit or abolish specific categories of weapons
- prevent certain military activities
- regulate the deployment of forces
- reduce the risk of an accidental war etc.

#### 4.6. Distinction between drones and autonomous systems:

In the case of drones, both the payload and the aircraft itself are operated by the pilot or payload operator by remote control. Here, the degree of autonomy of drones is constantly evolving through technology, so that some can now independently fly pre-programmed flight routes or automatically track an intended target, for example by using a laser target marker. These are automatic or human-supervised systems. In contrast, we speak of autonomous or semi-autonomous systems as soon as the system makes the decision on the selection of the target or

the determination of the flight route independently, i.e., the system no longer requires human operation or authorization regarding the specific application. In the case of drones, however, this technology has not yet been applied to either the control of the missile or the operation of the payload. The selection or decision is still made by a person.

## 5. Introducing the Topic

Robots at the trigger - that sounds like science fiction. Fact is that around 60 countries and armies are currently working on such autonomous lethal weapons systems. In the fractions of a second, they evaluate available data and can thus decide precisely when and where to fire. They cannot be distracted by anything. Human error is no longer a source of error, and precise warfare with combat robots reduces collateral damage. This development and the possibilities associated with it raise many questions and ethical concerns.

Based on the experiences of recent history, it can unfortunately be assumed that mankind will continue to wage wars. History also shows that technical innovations have always made killing more efficient, for example the invention of longbows, artillery, tanks, aircraft carriers or nuclear weapons. It is widely believed that each of these new techniques brought a revolution in military affairs because they each fundamentally changed warfare. Today, robotics is viewed by many as a potential new military revolution, especially in light of increasingly autonomous combat systems.

Consequently, disarmament and especially arms control must be debated, and new treaties need to be negotiated.

## 6. History:

Under United Nations auspices in 1979-1980 the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects (CCW) was negotiated. With its roots in key international humanitarian law (IHL) principles, the Convention has five Protocols - Protocol I on Non-Detectable Fragments; Protocol II on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Mines, Booby-Traps and Other Devices (as amended on 3 May 1996); Protocol III on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Incendiary Weapons; Protocol IV on Blinding Laser Weapons; and Protocol V on Explosive Remnants of War. Thus, it has a modular design that allows new instruments to be attached to the framework treaty as humanitarian concerns around weapons systems evolve and as new systems emerge.

Discussion on remotely controlled weapons reemerged at the human rights forums in Geneva 2012-2013. The conference raised awareness about the issues with this type of weaponry and the following CCW in Geneva between 2014 and 2016 helped building a consensus among the most significant countries to establish a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE).

In its first formal meeting the GGE concluded that CCW was the right framework for dealing with the topic and that IHL applies fully to the potential development and use of LAWS.

In the following two meetings the GGE discussed the construction of a human-machine interface in order to ensure IHL by increasing human responsibility and accountability.



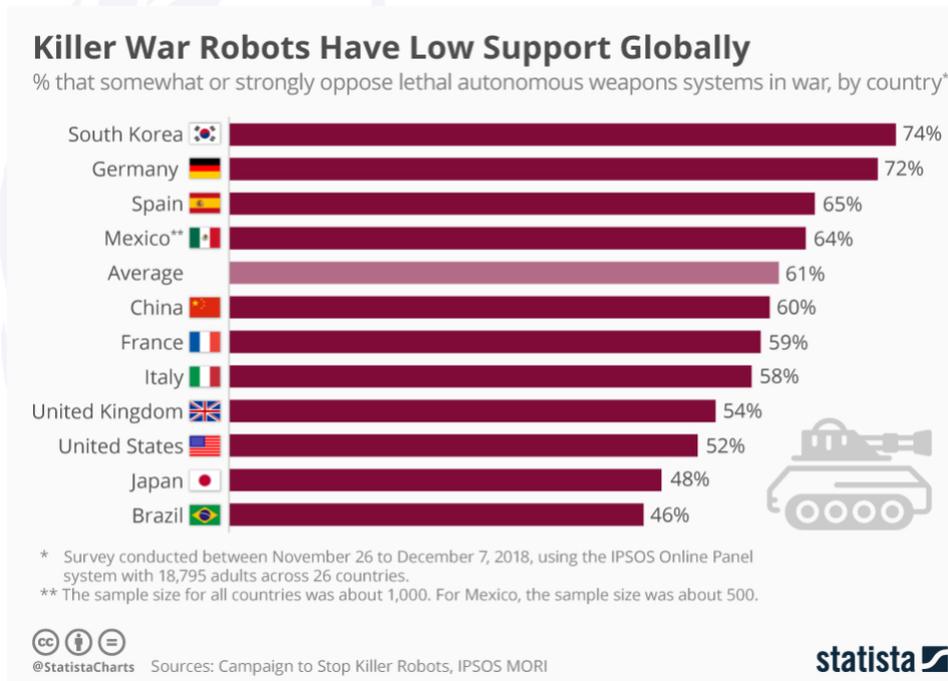
At the U.N.'s Conference on Certain Conventional Weapons in December 2021 no real progress was made, even though UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres had said before the meeting that the conference "must swiftly advance its work on autonomous weapons that can choose targets and kill people without human interference." Nevertheless, he encouraged conference members "to agree on an ambitious plan for the future to establish restrictions on the use of certain types of autonomous weapons."

<h2 style="text-align: center;">GGE ON LAWS</h2> <h3 style="text-align: center;">Guiding principles</h3>	
<p><b>International humanitarian law</b> applies fully to all weapons systems, including the potential development and use of LAWS.</p>	<p><b>Human responsibility</b> for decisions on the use of weapons systems must be retained since accountability cannot be transferred to machines. This should be considered across the entire life cycle of the weapons system.</p>
<p><b>Human-machine interaction</b> should ensure that the potential use of weapons systems based on LAWS is in compliance with applicable international law, in particular IHL. In determining the quality and extent of human-machine interaction, a range of factors should be considered including the operational context, and the characteristics and capabilities of the weapons system as a whole.</p>	<p><b>Accountability</b> for developing, deploying and using any emerging weapons system must be ensured in accordance with applicable international law, including through the operation of such systems within a responsible chain of human command and control.</p>
<p>In the study, development, acquisition, or adoption of a new weapon, means or method of warfare, determination must be made whether its employment would be <b>prohibited by international law</b>.</p>	<p>When developing or acquiring new weapons systems based on emerging technologies in the area of LAWS, <b>physical security, appropriate non-physical safeguards</b> (including cyber-security against hacking or data spoofing), <b>the risk of acquisition by terrorist groups and the risk of proliferation should be considered</b>.</p>
<p><b>Risk assessments and mitigation measures</b> should be part of the design, development, testing and deployment cycle of emerging technologies in any weapons systems.</p>	<p>In crafting potential policy measures, emerging technologies in the area of LAWS should <b>not be anthropomorphized</b>.</p>
<p>Consideration should be given to the use of emerging technologies in the area of LAWS in <b>upholding compliance with IHL</b> and other applicable international legal obligations.</p>	<p>Discussions and any potential policy measures taken within the context of the CCW should <b>not hamper progress</b> in or access to peaceful uses of intelligent autonomous technologies.</p>
<p>Extract from the 2019 report (advanced version) of the GGE on LAWS.</p>	

## 7. Current situations and agreements

Although the topic of fully autonomous weapons systems is increasingly in the international spotlight, few countries have yet developed formal national policies. The only detailed policy that exists in written form is the U.S. Department of Defense's November 2012 directive requiring, for a period of up to ten years, that a human be "operator in the loop" in which decisions to use lethal force are made, although senior Pentagon officials can override this provision. The United Kingdom, in turn, has stated that autonomous weapons systems will "always" remain under human control.

Even though many states have now spoken out publicly on this issue: The declarations have not been incorporated into national basic statutes. It remains with usually quite vaguely kept vague expressions of concern and/or interest in this issue. Some countries, such as Pakistan, have spoken out in favor of banning such weapons. Also, according to new research from the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, lethal autonomous weapons systems have low Support among 26 surveyed countries, with South Korea being the strongest opposer and Brazil the least opposing country.



## 8. Armed Drones in International Humanitarian Law:

The development of drones can be dated to around the time of the Second World War. During the Vietnam War (1955-1975), they were used for the first time for reconnaissance purposes, and in 2001, the first use of armed drones took place in Afghanistan. Thus, the relevant treaty texts were written well before the use of armed drones. However, as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) already noted in its Advisory Opinion on the Use of nuclear weapons, international humanitarian law is permeated by the fundamental humanitarian principle. In order to be able to respond to the ongoing innovations in weapons and warfare inherent in armed conflict, international humanitarian

law is, by its very nature, designed to be able to encompass them and thus to permanently ensure a minimum humanitarian standard. Therefore, in principle, it is also applicable to technologies developed after the legal basis was created.

The basic problem of an international law perspective on the phenomenon of armed drones is first of all the fact that the drones themselves are not weapons, i.e., "combat equipment" in the technical sense, but rather, from a basic point of view, solely and exclusively an (unmanned) military aircraft that serves as a weapons platform. However, only the combat equipment is regulated by international humanitarian law, not the weapons platforms.

Nevertheless, international humanitarian law also applies to armed drones. However, restrictions arise here regarding the specific use, so that it is generally a matter of weighing up the military advantage against the expected damage, in particular with regard to compliance with the principle of distinction in individual cases. Furthermore, as an aircraft, the drone is bound by the customary regulations of air warfare and must observe the neutrality law of the states in its use.

## 9. Guiding Questions

- What access possibilities does your country have to such systems?
- Does your country develop and/or produce Drones and/or Self-Firing Weapon Systems?
- What moral and ethical objections has your country and how does it deal with them?
- What are the legal objections and responsibilities considered by your country?
- What are the technical problems your country is concerned about?

## 10. Final words

We are looking forward seeing you at OMUN 2022 in summer and we hope to have some interesting debates and good resolutions. The committee guide should help you to familiarize yourself with the topic and get motivated to learn more about provisions for ensuring safe access into, operation in, and return from outer space.

If you have any questions regarding your preparation for the committee and the conference itself, please feel free to contact us ([ga1@olmun.org](mailto:ga1@olmun.org)).

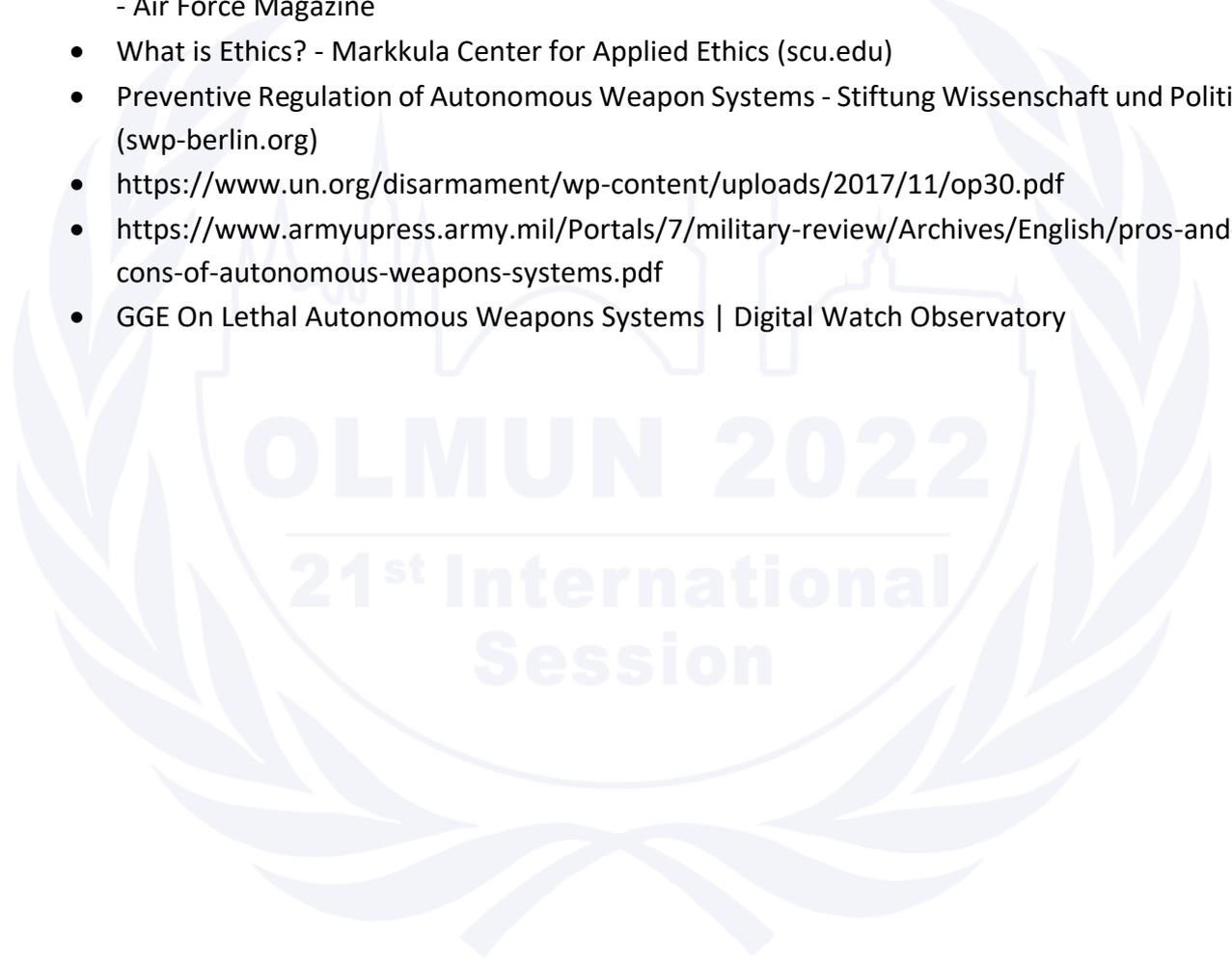
Tips!

- Do not start too late with your research
- Your opinion does not matter, you should speak from your country's point of view
- Stay in your role
- Be ready and do not be afraid to read out your policy statement
- Use a variety of sources for your research
- Stay realistic
- Elaborate a comprehensible, realistic resolution considering the position of your country

## 11. Further research

We have collected a few links that can help you to start off your research. However, keep in mind that they are just meant as extra information. Your research can and should go further than these links and does not necessarily have to include any of them. It is your job to find a way of doing research that yields the results you are looking for and, just as important, lets you enjoy this process and allows you to follow your curiosity and interests.

- The Role of the United Nations in Addressing Emerging Technologies in the Area of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems | United Nations
- UN Addresses Lethal Autonomous Weapons—aka 'Killer Robots'—Amid Calls for a Treaty - Air Force Magazine
- What is Ethics? - Markkula Center for Applied Ethics (scu.edu)
- Preventive Regulation of Autonomous Weapon Systems - Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (swp-berlin.org)
- <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/op30.pdf>
- <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/pros-and-cons-of-autonomous-weapons-systems.pdf>
- GGE On Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems | Digital Watch Observatory



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