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Disarmament and International Security Committee

Topic 1: Regulating the Use of AI-Enabled Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)

-Committee Guide-

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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC), also known as the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), is one of the UN's six Main Committees and serves as a central forum for addressing issues related to international peace, disarmament, and global security. Established in 1945, alongside the founding of the United Nations, DISEC was created in direct response to the devastation of the Second World War, reflecting the international community's shared commitment to preventing future conflict through diplomacy and multilateral cooperation.

In contrast to the Security Council, all 193 UN member states participate in DISEC. It does not issue resolutions, it issues recommendations and reports that shape international norms, influence treaty negotiations and reflect the global consensus on urgent matters.

The DISEC works on the regulation and reduction of conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear, chemical and biological weapons; the non-proliferation of arms; the prevention of armed conflict; the promotion of international security; and the mitigation of emerging threats such as terrorism, cyberwarfare and autonomous weapons systems, as well as the militarization of outer space, private military companies and the ethical implications of artificial intelligence in warfare.

DISEC's most recent concerns have been mediating the growing geopolitical tensions, the development of lethal autonomous weapons, the rise of cyber threats and the risks of nuclear arms proliferation.

By providing a space where all member states can participate equally in global conversation on peace and security, DISEC upholds the core values of the United

Nations: the pursuit of disarmament, the prevention of war and the protection of future generations from violence and instability.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

LAWS stands for Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems Though not clearly defined, they are generally understood as weapons that can select and attack targets without direct human control.

While basic systems like landmines have operated autonomously for decades, newer technologies include missile defense systems, sentry guns, and loitering munitions (e.g., kamikaze drones). These newer systems are increasingly sophisticated, with greater range, payload, and potential AI integration. AI is not the only way to make weapons autonomous, but it improves their performance. In contrast to pre-programmed rules, AI allows weapons to make decisions and adapt to their environment on their own.

The UN Secretary-General considers LAWS “politically unacceptable and morally repugnant” and has called for a prohibition on systems that operate without human oversight. In his 2023 New Agenda for Peace, he urged states to adopt a legally binding treaty by 2026. UN special rapporteurs have also raised concerns about LAWS since 2013, citing serious legal, ethical, humanitarian and human rights risks. One of the main reasons LAWS raise ethical concerns is the lack of accountability.

Today, countries like Russia, China, Turkey and the United States are developing and deploying these technologies on a growing scale, often without clear regulatory frameworks or oversight. In March 2020, reports from the United Nations confirmed that a Turkish-made Kargu-2 drone carried out a fully autonomous attack in Libya, possibly the first instance of a machine taking lethal action without human input, a milestone that brought the LAWS debate to the international forefront.

II. FACTS AND CURRENT SITUATION

1. FACTS

Main users/developers:

- United States, Russia, China, Israel, Turkey, South Korea, UK, India, Iran

Types of systems in use:

- Defensive CIWS (Close-In Weapon System, e.g., U.S. Phalanx, Israel’s Trophy, Russia's Arena) automatically targets and shoots down incoming missiles or projectiles.
- Stationary “sentry guns” in South Korea and Israel automatically detect and track potential threats.
- Offensive loitering munitions and autonomous drones (e.g., Turkey's STM Kargu-2).

2. CURRENT SITUATION

The first confirmed use of a fully autonomous weapon occurred in 2020 in Libya, when a Turkish-made Kargu-2 drone is believed to have engaged targets without a human controller. Since then, states such as Russia, Israel, China, Turkey, and the United States have accelerated their development and deployment of LAWS, particularly in conflicts like those in Ukraine and Gaza.

The debate over LAWS is sharply divided. A growing coalition of states,led by Austria, Brazil, New Zealand, and many Global South countries, support a legally binding international treaty banning or regulating these systems. They argue that decisions over life and death must remain under meaningful human control, and that LAWS threaten

international humanitarian law, especially the principles of distinction, proportionality and accountability.

On the other hand, major military powers such as the United States, Russia, China and India oppose a ban, arguing that LAWS can enhance precision, reduce casualties, and are manageable under already existing international law. These countries prefer national guidelines or voluntary frameworks rather than binding treaties.

In December 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution (supported by 164 states) calling for the development of international legal measures to govern the use of autonomous weapons. Despite this momentum, no binding agreement has been reached. The UN Secretary-General has set a target of 2026 for establishing global norms on this issue.

Meanwhile, humanitarian organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross and Human Rights Watch warn that the unchecked spread of LAWS could lead to a new arms race, misuse by non-state actors, and escalation of armed conflict without human accountability. The risk of error, hacking, and unpredictable machine behavior, further underscores the urgency of international action.

III. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

LAWS are not a single type of weapons, but rather a category of capability, i.e. weapon systems that incorporate autonomy in its critical functions, specifically in target selection and engagement. The challenges of these weapon systems come from this ability, which creates unpredictability and could potentially trigger unintended chain reactions that might escalate a conflict.

Semi-Autonomous Weapons are weapons that can perform some tasks independently (e.g. navigation), but require human authorization to engage targets.

Loitering Munition is a drone or missile that waits passively in the air for a target to appear and then autonomously attacks it.

Black Box Decision-Making AI systems are systems whose decision processes are not transparent or understandable to humans, making it difficult to assign responsibility after errors.

The CCW (Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons) is a UN framework that regulates inhumane weapons, which cause **unnecessary suffering, severe injury or other uncontrolled effects**. Since 2013, it has hosted discussions on LAWS through Groups of Governmental Experts (GGEs).

IV. MAJOR PARTIES INVOLVED

The global debate on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) highlights a growing divide between powerful military states and countries focused on humanitarian concerns. Nations such as the United States, Russia, China and Israel are leading the development of these weapons, emphasizing their potential to improve military efficiency and reduce human casualties on the battlefield. These states argue that existing international humanitarian law is enough to regulate their use and oppose any binding international ban that could limit their strategic advantages.

On the other hand, a large and growing group of countries, including Austria, Mexico, Brazil, Pakistan and many African and Latin American states, are pushing for strict regulation or a complete ban on LAWS. These countries are often less involved in the development of advanced military technologies and are more vulnerable to the consequences of their misuse or accidental deployment. Many of them have experienced the devastating impacts of armed conflict on civilian populations and argue that allowing machines to make autonomous decisions about life and death is both unethical and dangerous. They fear that LAWS could be used against weaker states, non-state actors and civilian populations, particularly in regions where oversight and accountability are weak.

International organizations such as the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross have echoed these concerns, calling for strong global norms and legal instruments to ensure human control is maintained. Human rights groups and NGOs, especially the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, continue to warn that without regulation, these weapons could lead to a new era of warfare in which the most affected are civilians in politically unstable or technologically disadvantaged regions. Although no binding treaty exists yet, the UN Secretary-General has called for progress toward an international framework by 2026, highlighting the urgency of protecting those most at risk from the unchecked spread of autonomous weapons.

V. EVALUATION OF PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS

Since 2013 the UN has been working on the topic with the CCW, a UN framework that bans or restricts weapons considered excessively injurious or indiscriminate, when they began holding informal discussions. In 2016, these talks were formalized through the establishment of a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS. This GGE has met almost every year since, but has not reached consensus on a definition of LAWS nor on whether to ban or regulate them.

In 2018, the GGE adopted 11 non-binding guiding principles, such as, human accountability must always be retained and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) still applies to all weapon systems.

Since 2020, countries such as Austria, Brazil, Chile and Mexico led regional coalitions calling for a preemptive ban on fully autonomous weapons. Over 70 countries, supported by NGOs like the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots and the ICRC, endorsed the idea of “meaningful human control.” In 2023, the UN General Assembly passed its first dedicated resolution on LAWS, supported by 164 states. The resolution encouraged work towards legally binding instruments. Finally, in May 2025, the first debate exclusively on LAWS was held.

VI. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

One possible solution is to establish a legally binding international treaty that bans weapons capable of operating without human control and provides clear definitions of autonomy and accountability. . Another option is to create a UN monitoring body similar to the IAEA for nuclear issues.This body would monitor the development, investigate violations or incidents involving LAWS and provide technical assistance. Additionally, states could disclose information on their LAWS programs and participate in joint research on ethics and AI safety. Finally, legal frameworks should close the accountability gap by clarifying who is responsible when LAWS cause harm.

VII. SOURCES / USEFUL LINKS

https://disarmament.unoda.org/the-convention-on-certain-conventional-weapons/background-on-laws-in-the-ccw/

https://docs-library.unoda.org/Convention_on_Certain_Conventional_Weapons_-Group_of_Governmental_Experts_on_Lethal_Autonomous_Weapons_Systems_(2023)/CCW_GGE1_2023_CRP.1_0.pdf