EDITORIAL: MISUSE OF CONSENSUS STRIKES AGAIN
Katrin Geyer | Reaching Critical Will of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

The 2018 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) came to an anti-climactic end shortly before midnight on Friday, 23 November. The three days of deliberations focused more on discussing what issues to not discuss next year, once again illustrating the problem of treating consensus as requiring absolute unanimity. Rather than respecting multilateralism, a few individual states—in this case particularly China and Russia—exploited their power to not only weaken the body’s mandates for 2019 but also misrepresent discussions in the final report.

Russia managed to reduce the amount of time that states will meet in 2019 to discuss lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) from ten days to just seven. Despite more than 30 delegations having expressed grave concern at the impact of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) on civilians, less than a handful of delegations managed to reduce such references in the final report to a bare minimum. The Convention’s Protocol III on incendiary weapons, addressed by many delegations in this year’s CCW as a separate agenda item, was simply erased for further consideration next year and will not be considered separately.

CCW high contracting parties decided to hold two meetings of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGEs) on LAWS. The first one will take place from 25-29 March 2019, and the second is scheduled from 20-21 August 2019. Mr. Ljupco Jivan Gjorgjinski of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia was confirmed as the chair of the CCW’s deliberations on autonomous weapons next year.

The CCW’s annual meeting of High Contracting Parties will be held on 13-15 November 2019, and will be chaired by the Ambassador of Pakistan, H.E Farukh Amil.

In stark contrast to the minimalism within the CCW is the ever-growing pressure and momentum sustained by the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, of which WILPF is a steering committee member, to prevent the development of weapon systems that would select and attack targets without human intervention. Our calls are heeded by a critical mass of 28 states that seek to negotiate a new treaty to ban fully autonomous weapons, as well as the UN Secretary-General and the majority of other states, all of which support the urgent need to retain meaningful human control over weapon systems.

Several governments have also coalesced around stronger action to address the use of EWIPA. This was powerfully illustrated during the 2018 UNGA First Committee, where more than 50 states presented a joint statement on the issue, and more than 30 delegations continued to express concern about the humanitarian impacts on civilians of EWIPA during this Meeting of High Contracting Parties (MHCP). The International Network on Explosive Weapons, of which WILPF is also a steering group member, has called on states to prevent humanitarian harm by ending the use of EWIPA. Many states, and the UN Secretary-General, have supported action on this item in various forms over the past few years.

Against this backdrop, it appears that the CCW may not be the right forum to address increasing pressure on a variety of humanitarian arms concerns. Those wanting to prevent the development of new technologies of violence, or end the bombing and shelling of towns and cities, might have to find other avenues in the multilateral system to allow the majority of the global community to tackle threats posed by EWIPA, killer robots, and other weapons that continue to cause immense humanitarian suffering. We know that when the majority is heard, when the disarmament community does not lose faith in multilateralism and uses creativity, courage, and boldness, it can achieve great things. •
AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS
Katrin Geyer | Reaching Critical Will of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

During the general debate and the session on autonomous weapon systems, states spoke to the outcome document of the August meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), as well as to suggestions for the content of the GGE’s mandate for 2019. El Salvador and Morocco added their voices to the growing number of states calling for a ban on autonomous weapons, and requested the start of negotiations towards this objective. This has boosted the number of states calling for a ban to 28.

Under the agenda item, the chair of the 2018 GGE meetings, Mr. Amandeep Singh Gill of India, presented the Group’s adopted report before delegations took the floor to discuss how to progress on the issue. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, and two members of the campaign—the Centre for International Security Policy (CISP) and the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC)—contributed with statements.

Views on the way forward

None of the 88 states participating in the CCW meeting objected to continuing formal discussions on autonomous weapon systems. The overwhelming majority, including Switzerland, Netherlands, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Ireland, Germany, France, Argentina, Australia, Finland, Costa Rica, Pakistan, Costa Rica, Brazil, South Africa, Colombia, Canada, the European Union (EU), Estonia, Guatemala, Panama, Sweden, Spain, Belgium, and Finland spoke out in favour of continuing discussions for at least ten days spread over two sessions to allow for “reflection between meetings,” as Ireland put it. Germany argued that ten days is the “absolute minimum necessary,” and that if it had the choice, it would schedule many more days so to ensure a results-based outcome. In this vein, Pakistan noted that “the concerns surrounding LAWS have exacerbated and become more pronounced. The consequences, especially on international peace and security, are too grave to be ignored.”

Russia proposed to limit discussions to one week in light of the “differences that still exist.” China supported this.

The vast majority of states wished for the GGE in 2019 to be more concrete and focused. Various delegations suggested to focus discussions on the required degree and quality of human control, and how to ensure compliance with international law, in particular international humanitarian law, of emerging weapon systems with increasingly autonomous functions. The ICRC submitted a working paper on this topic, “The Element of Human Control,” urging states to discuss what human control over the critical functions of weapon systems means in practice so to ensure legal compliance and ethical acceptability. Many states, including Austria, the UK, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Chile welcomed ICRC’s working paper. Austria said that relevant questions in paragraph nine of ICRC’s working paper should guide the GGE’s work in 2019.

The United States, France, and Australia said that it is “too premature” to initiate discussions for a legally binding instrument. Russia urged avoiding “hasty decisions,” and that changing the mandate from a discussion-based one to advancing negotiations of a legally binding instrument is “unfounded and counterproductive.”

Austria, Chile, and Brazil referred to their joint proposal, made in August 2018, for a mandate to negotiate a “legally binding instrument to ensure meaningful human control over critical functions in lethal autonomous weapon systems,” as reiterated by Brazil. Ecuador, Guatemala, Panama, Cuba, Peru, Egypt, El Salvador, Morocco, Costa Rica, Iraq, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Guatemala, and the Holy See, amongst others, expressed their support for a ban on fully autonomous weapon systems. Ireland and Austria called on states to heed the UN Secretary-General’s recent call to ban on autonomous weapons at the Lisbon Web Summit, where he deemed such weapons to be “politically unacceptable and morally repugnant.”

Germany, along with France, proposed the development of a political declaration on autonomous weapons in August. It reiterated its preference for the GGE to take forward that goal, and suggested a code of conduct and confidence-building measures as further tangible measures to be pursued alongside a declaration. Spain, Switzerland, Ireland, Sweden, Bulgaria, Belgium, and Italy supported this approach. Switzerland observed that a declaration would require extensive work, but that the process could give the discussion focus. Morocco said that it supports a political declaration as a step towards negotiating an international standard banning autonomous weapons. Bulgaria and Switzerland also indicated that such a declaration wouldn’t be the end point but could provide guidance on the way forward. Belgium said it did not exclude the adoption of legal measures once discussions around autonomous weapon systems have matured.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), Sri Lanka, Liechtenstein, and Ireland said that they would like to see 2019 to yield concrete policy recommendations including elements of a legally binding instrument regulating AWS. The NAM reiterated that other proposed measures, such as a political declaration, weapons review processes, or a code continued on next page
Autonomous weapon systems, continued

of conduct cannot be a “substitute for the objective of concluding a legally binding instrument.” Colombia supported such measures as interim steps towards a legally binding instrument. New Zealand said that it was open to all presented options and did not see them as mutually exclusive.

The NAM, Egypt, and Colombia called upon states to declare moratoria on the further development and use of autonomous weapons.

Australia, Italy, and Israel proposed discussing both “potential benefits” and challenges of using autonomous technology in weapon systems in 2019, with Australia arguing that there is “no doubt” that autonomous technology brings benefits.

While many states appreciated the invaluable input and work by civil society organisations, Croatia and Mexico explicitly expressed its commitment to continue working with the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots.

Panama, Venezuela, and Cuba also called for the regulation of unmanned vehicles and armed drones.

General views on autonomous weapon systems

Many delegations, including the Republic of Korea (ROK), the EU, Ireland, Liechtenstein, France, Canada, Romania, and Belgium welcomed the last GGE’s “Possible Guiding Principles”, and the focus of the centrality of human control.

Despite divergent views expressed during the August GGE, a general sense has developed that all weapon systems, including autonomous weapons, must comply with international humanitarian law (IHL), as observed by the NAM. The European Union (EU), India, Finland, Bulgaria, Liechtenstein, Costa Rica, Ireland, Ecuador, Greece, Spain, Italy, France, South Africa, Cuba, Sweden, and Israel, amongst others, reaffirmed these observations. NAM, Ireland, Ecuador, Japan, Greece, Italy, Cuba, Liechtenstein, Costa Rica, Austria, Colombia, the UK, Peru, Sweden, and France welcomed the reaffirmation in the report that any future weapon must remain under human control.

Costa Rica, Cuba, Iraq, the Holy See, Panama, Austria, Peru, and others expressed concern at a potential arms race in this area.

Photo: Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, 2018.
A round 30 delegations addressed the topic of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) during the general debate and under agenda item “emerging issues”. The vast majority of those addressing the use of EWIPA recognised their humanitarian harm. In particular, Costa Rica, Ireland, Switzerland, Bulgaria, Spain, the United Kingdom (UK), Mexico, Poland, Finland, Chile, Guatemala, Morocco, Canada, and Italy expressed grave concern at the use of EWIPA. The Holy See described EWIPA as “weapons of mass displacement” as refugees and the displaced increasingly flee from conventional weapons use in urban settings. Switzerland, Mexico, Austria, and Canada referred to the joint statement by 50 states, presented during UN First Committee as a sign of increasing concern over the use of EWIPA. To effectively address the harm caused by EWIPA, Costa Rica and Argentina highlighted the need for increased victim support.

The EU recognised the challenges associated with the use of EWIPA and their impact on civilians. The UK reassured that it seeks to “actively minimise” the effects to civilians in populated areas. The UK argued, however, that “it is not possible to remove risk entirely— particularly when combatting armed groups who actively seek to exploit proximity to civilians … to further their ends.” New Zealand reiterated its call for “states to avoid, or in any event minimise, the use of [EWIPA].” The Netherlands addressed EWIPA indirectly, noting that it “seeks to lower the number of civilian casualties, a task that remains crucial in a time where densely populated areas have become increasingly arenas of conflict.” It also spoke to the need to “mitigate” the harm on civilians and Australia stated that it supports efforts to “minimise the impact on civilian populations.” Guatemala advocated for states to avoid using EWIPA.

Despite the vast range of delegations expressing concern about EWIPA, the adopted report of the Meeting of High Contracting Parties did not mandate any concrete initiatives to effectively address EWIPA in future. As some states had contested the very existence of “EWIPA,” the report also did not use the term but instead noted states’ intention to submit working papers on challenges arising from conventional weapons use in “areas where there are concentrations of civilians.”

Views on the way forward

Many states, such as the EU, Italy, Panama, Finland, Canada, the Philippines, Mexico, New Zealand, Bulgaria, the UK, Belgium, Brazil, Spain, Mexico, and Germany supported the continuation of discussions on this topic within the CCW.

A German proposal, contained in its working paper, asked the CCW to mandate an informal working group that would present its discussions and outcomes at the 2019 Meeting of High Contracting Parties.

Some delegations, including Croatia and Chile, welcomed Germany’s working paper. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) followed suit but also said it wished the paper was stronger. The high likelihood of indiscriminate effects caused by EWIPA, thereby violating international humanitarian law (IHL) rules, demonstrates the need to avoid the use of such weapons altogether. Ecuador reiterated such analysis and called on states not to use EWIPA and urged to advance discussions about regulating or prohibiting their use, while Switzerland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Spain, Austria, Finland, Ireland, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile specifically supported Germany’s proposal to establish an open-ended informal working group under the CCW.

A number of states, including Ireland, Chile, Morocco, Austria, Mozambique, Mexico, New Zealand, and Spain supported work towards developing an international political declaration next year outside of the CCW. In this vein, a number of states welcomed work ongoing on this issue in other fora including the recent joint statement made by 50 states at UN First Committee. Many delegations stressed that different initiatives aren’t mutually exclusive but complementary. Ireland noted that such a declaration would not ban the use of these weapons but that, through providing “clarification and setting out a commitment to adopt and update, where relevant, national policies and practices on EWIPA,” it would enhance compliance with IHL.

Ireland and Ecuador welcomed that the UN Secretary-General prioritised EWIPA in his “Agenda for Disarmament” released earlier this year. Ireland recognised the need to respond to his call to address the humanitarian impact of EWIPA, “including through the development of a possible political declaration; common standards, practices and operational policies; the collection of data on collateral harm and through the sharing of policy and practice.”

Germany argued that new norms aren’t needed but that further discussions are required on how to better operationalise IHL. Ireland and Greece, Spain, Italy, New Zealand noted that greater compliance with IHL is needed to ensure the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure. Canada, Israel, the United States (US), and China observed that the issue with these types of weapons arises from a lack...
Explosive weapons in populated areas, continued

of implementing IHL instead of being a problem of a specific weapon. Russia noted that there is no need for developing new standards or additional work as the issue of EWIPA is already addressed through the CCW and its protocols.

EWIPA—a “fake concept”?

China described the concept of EWIPA as “fake,” arguing that most weapons are supposed to explode and that all countries fight in populated areas as opposed to “no-man-zones.” It cautioned against the “proliferation of agenda items” in light of the CCW’s financial difficulties. China insisted that EWIPA is not an “emerging” but an “historical” issue, and therefore called to delete EWIPA in the agenda for next year.

The UK added that it is concerned that current discussions “use broad and largely undefined terms which do not adequately reflect the principles and practises of existing IHL.” Israel also referred to EWIPA as being a “vague and broad” concept that “lumps together” actors taking opposing approaches to IHL. It described these as states abiding by IHL, and terrorist groups deliberately conducting operations from within populated environments to exploit civilian presence as a shield. Israel spoke against including EWIPA in the agenda. The US also opposed including the topic as additional agenda item in 2019.

Turkey was unsure if the CCW is the right forum to address EWIPA in light of financial difficulties and the danger of duplication.

It is mind-boggling how some states seek to argue that the realities of the use of EWIPA are “fake”. In response, various delegations including Ecuador, Canada, Ireland, Morocco and Guatemala cited the UN Secretary-General’s report on the protection of civilians in armed conflict and the shocking figures of civilian casualties of EWIPA. The Secretary-General observed that “in 2017, out of a total of 42,972 people killed or injured by explosive weapons, 31,904, or three out of every four victims, were civilians—a 38 per cent increase compared with 2016. When explosive weapons were used in populated areas, 92 per cent of the casualties were civilians.” This issue must be addressed urgently in order to save lives and prevent the catastrophic destruction of towns and cities caught in conflict around the world.

Notes

1. The final report has not yet been released at the time of publication. We therefore cannot guarantee that the exact wording in the adopted report concurs with RCW’s notes, and encourage readers to check against the final report once published.

SETBACK NOT SURRENDER ON INCENDIARY WEAPONS

Bonnie Docherty | Human Rights Watch and Harvard Law School’s International Human Rights Clinic

Countries widely condemned recent use of incendiary weapons at the 2018 Meeting of High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW). They also called for dedicating further time in future meetings to discuss their concerns and to consider ways to advance civilian protection.

In a year in which incendiary weapons killed or injured hundreds of individuals, however, one state showed disregard for the human consequences of these cruel weapons and disrespect for the views of its fellow nations. Taking advantage of the meeting’s consensus rules, Russia blocked proposals to keep CCW Protocol III on incendiary weapons on next year’s agenda. The final report reflected concerns about use but removed the specific slot for addressing them.

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Incendiary weapons cause excruciating burns that require painful treatment as well as respiratory damage. People who survive initial injuries often experience psychological trauma and severe disfigurement which can lead them to being shunned by society. The Syrian-Russian military alliance has used these weapons in Syria for several years, and Human Rights Watch documented 30 new attacks with incendiary weapons in 2018.

Legal loopholes in Protocol III have prevented it from adequately protecting civilians from incendiary weapons.

Sixteen states spoke on incendiary weapons and the shortcomings of international law in the general debate and under the Protocol III agenda item; virtually all of them condemned recent use. Twelve of the states explicitly recommended continuing discussions and/or strengthening Protocol III. The European Union and UN High Representative of Disarmament Affairs also condemned use, and the latter called for continued on next page
Incendiary weapons, continued

for a “thorough review” of existing law.

Only Russia insisted that discussions under an agenda item were unnecessary.

During later deliberations about the final report, Russia received some backing from China and Cuba, but Costa Rica and the United States joined those advocating for the agenda item.

Foreshadowing its approach to almost every issue on the CCW’s docket, Russia made three arguments for taking Protocol III off the agenda. First, it contended there was limited support for the agenda item. Yet even countries not currently in favour of amending the Protocol, such as the United States, recommended keeping the slot given that states parties had previously determined it had merit.

Second, Russia argued that other agenda items, notably on the CCW’s universalisation and implementation, sufficiently covered Protocol III. Dedicated separate time to discuss incendiary weapons, however, raises the issue’s profile. In addition, a number of states emphasised that resolving the shortcomings of Protocol III requires more than attracting new parties and promoting compliance.

Third, Russia suggested that continuing to consider Protocol III is inappropriate given the CCW’s financial difficulties. But high contracting parties could have ample time for substantive dialogue on the topic, if they did not spend more time debating the future of the discussions than they did on the discussions themselves.

The removal of the agenda item on Protocol III represented the first step backwards on this issue since 2010, when three states brought the horror of incendiary weapons to the attention of CCW high contracting parties. Each year, condemnation and calls for action have increased, and in 2016, the Review Conference agreed by consensus to create a separate agenda item to address the Protocol.

The setback of last week should, nonetheless, be seen as a challenge rather than a failure. At the CCW’s 2019 meeting, states should demand renewed discussions about the adequacy of Protocol III and ways to increase civilian protection. In the meantime, they should work to build support for and develop fresh approaches to advancing the agenda. States owe it to the civilians of Syria and other conflict zones to ensure incendiary weapons are a disarmament priority.

MINE OTHER THAN ANTI-PERSONNEL MINES

Katrin Geyer | Reaching Critical Will of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

One day prior to the Meeting of High Contracting Parties (MCHP) to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), delegations discussed the issue of MOTAPM at length as part of discussions on the CCW’s Amended Protocol II (APII). It was marked by highly divergent views on the topic. During the MCHP’s general debate and under agenda item “Other matters,” many delegations acknowledged the existence of divergent views regarding MOTAPM. The Meeting agreed to continue informal open consultations and to report to MHCP in 2019.1

Views on the humanitarian impact of MOTAPM

The UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action (UNMAS) and Croatia cited a recent study by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), indicating that in 2017, 51 per cent of recorded MOTAPM casualties were civilians.

The European Union (EU) and Ireland also highlighted that they are concerned at the humanitarian impact of the heavy consequences on social and economic development arising from the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of MOTAPM. Italy argued that MOTPM use should be restricted. The EU, the Netherlands, and Ireland acknowledged that MOTAPM are legitimate weapons, provided they are used in a manner that ensures the protection of civilians, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Greece, the Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Sweden, and Kazakhstan added that while taking note of humanitarian concerns arising from their indiscriminate use, military concerns should not be ignored.

Views on the way forward

The EU, UNMAS, the US, Croatia, Argentina, Belgium the Netherlands, Italy, Australia, Sri Lanka, Mexico, Montenegro, South Africa, Israel, Ireland, the ICRC, the Philippines, Greece, Chile, Austria, Argentina, Croatia, Costa Rica, and Switzerland called for MOTAPM to remain on the agenda for further discussions. Sweden stated that it is willing to engage in discussions to improve better protection for civilians, whether within the whole Convention or under APII.

Turkey said that “if it serves to improve security of continued on next page
children by possible additional measures,” it supports further discussion on the issue. Croatia argued, “Difficulties in reaching common ground should not itself be a barrier to making serious attempts for improving international law restrictions on weapons such as MOTAPM; it should actually stimulate us to search for solutions that will ultimately reduce the humanitarian risks associated with MOTAPM.”

Panama went even further and called for deepened discussions on the negotiation of a legally binding instrument regulating the use, production, development, and transfer of MOTAPM.

Australia proposed focusing on approaches to increase detectability or restricting the use of MOTAPM with the goal of “minimising post-conflict humanitarian harm” in the future work of CCW. Pakistan argued that “humanitarian concerns arising from the irresponsible use of MOTAPM can also be addressed by exploring some tangible and practical solutions, for instance, through the development of sophisticated yet affordable mine detectors and their sharing through an agreed cooperation and assistance mechanism under the CCW.”

Pakistan maintained that it is necessary to strengthen the implementation of the existing provisions of APII, instead of amending provisions that would hamper universalisation.

Russia opposed the inclusion of this issue in the agenda, as it found that the humanitarian risk does not exceed other ordnance and that humanitarian concerns can be addressed through the full implementation of existing IHL, in particular APII. Cuba and China also opposed further discussion under a separate agenda item on this issue due to lack of consensus and the CCW’s scarce resources.

Notes
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FINANCIAL MATTERS
Katrin Geyer | Reaching Critical Will of Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

A significant amount of time at the 2018 Meeting of High Contracting Parties (MHCP) revolved around states’ suggestions to address the administrative and fiscal challenges facing the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), taking away time from substantive deliberations. Close to 30 delegations expressed concern about the financial instability of the Convention. In seeking to address its financial instability, delegations became creative. China, for instance, suggested that observer organisations and non-governmental organisations that make statements during CCW deliberations should also make financial contributions. The undeniable financially dire situation also seemed to serve as convenient excuse for some states not to consider pressing issues, such as explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA) or incendiary weapons in future meetings. Delegations thoroughly compared flight and hotel costs when trying to decide on which days the 2019 meetings on autonomous weapon systems will occur. Russia, with arguably the largest delegation to this year’s MHCP, fervently opposed having one free day between meetings in August, contending it was unable to justify these additional costs in capital.

On a more reasonable note, many states stressed that the CCW’s financial instability arises from one fundamental problem: some states do not pay their assessed contributions in full and on time. As a result of this, meetings had to be cancelled in the past and the functioning of the Implementation Support Unit (ISU) suspended. Many delegations observed that these ad hoc measures are not sustainable. Yet, states could not agree to establish a contingency fund or set up a voluntary reserve, as was proposed by the MHCP’s Chair. The meeting did decide to request the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs (UN-ODA) to provide temporary staff support to ISU to support CCW, provided sufficient funding exists and without prejudice to future staffing arrangement of the ISU.

It is absurd that states are counting pennies to prevent the CCW from crumbling while many are spending ever-increasing amounts on the modernisation and acquisition of all kinds of weapons. Panama observed during the general debate that “military spending increases and arms races accelerate,” while at the same time the number of victims of conventional weapons increases each year, and “resources allocated to humanitarian aid, the eradication of poverty and social inequality, and the fight against climate change are limited.”
Close to a dozen delegations referred to gender in their statements, ranging from the gendered impact of conventional weapons, to the need to increase women’s participation, to broader gender dimensions in disarmament efforts.

The Republic of Korea (ROK) hoped to see “more vibrant discussions” on the need to incorporate gender perspectives into the work of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). It welcomed the inclusion of gender perspectives in this year’s UN General Assembly First Committee resolutions on conventional weapons. The United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) also called for the integration of a gender perspective in the work of CCW. Colombia stressed that it attaches great importance to include gender perspectives across all disarmament fora. The European Union (EU) noted that it supports gender mainstreaming and welcomed the increased consideration of gender issues at this year’s First Committee. Canada referred to a side event it held in August on the gender dimensions of autonomous weapon systems, which was premised on its belief that disarmament efforts “have fundamental gender dimensions and perspectives that must be systematically accounted for.”

Spain reaffirmed more broadly the importance of gender perspectives and empowerment of women as crucial aspects of any disarmament efforts. Spain and Montenegro advocated for the full implementation of UN Security Council 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and other relevant resolutions.

While the ROK recognised women’s underrepresentation in decision-making processes in disarmament efforts, Ireland and Colombia noted that greater diversity is key to improved decision-making. Ireland, Panama, Canada, and Colombia called on the Convention’s high contracting parties to consider how to best achieve a more equal participation between men and women.

The ROK and Canada recognised the disproportionate impact of armed conflicts on women and girls, and Canada called on states to take this into account so to ensure effectiveness of policies and programs in humanitarian assistance. Canada urged further to “prioritise a gender-responsive and evidence-based approach to humanitarian assistance supported by sex-disaggregated data.” New Zealand urged to increase understandings of the gendered impact of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA).

While it is promising that an increasing number of governments are recognising the importance of gender perspectives and gender diversity, in practice many seem to continue to struggle with what this means to the conduct of the business. In the late hours of Friday, delegations from the Netherlands and Russia referred to a “gentlemen’s agreement,” they had made regarding the amount of days allocated for meetings of the Group of Governmental Experts on AWS in 2019. References to such a term illustrate yet again the gendered power dynamics in multilateral disarmament processes, as well as the gender imbalance amongst delegates in disarmament fora.

Notes

SIDE EVENT REPORT: EUROPEAN VIEWS ON THE CALL TO BAN KILLER ROBOTS

Isabelle Jones | Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

On Wednesday, 21 November, the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots hosted a side event briefing “European views on the call to ban killer robots”. The briefing, moderated by Ms. Mary Wareham, Coordinator of the Campaign, featured a panel of European members of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots. The four speakers considered challenges raised by fully autonomous weapons, also known as lethal autonomous weapons systems, and recent efforts to address them at the national and regional level in Europe.

Mr. Daan Kayser, programme leader on autonomous weapons at PAX, a Dutch peace organisation, launched its new report “Crunch Time”, which provides an overview of the positions of European states on lethal autonomous weapon systems. It finds a general agreement of a “red line beyond which increasing autonomy in weapons systems is no longer acceptable.” He further discussed the European Parliament resolution adopted in September that calls for a ban on lethal autonomous weapon systems with cross-party support and an overwhelming majority of 82 per cent. In order to align with the European Parliament resolution, Mr. Kayser argued that European states should focus on human control over the critical functions, which would provide a framework to address the legal, ethical, and security concerns related to killer robots and make it possible to take next steps towards concrete policy outcomes.

Ms. Anne-Sophie Simpere, a member of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots in France, remarked that the French position on killer robots has gradually weakened since discussions started in 2013. While France agrees that humans should keep “sufficient control” over weapons systems and remain accountable, and that new weapons systems must be compliant with international humanitarian law (IHL), their proposal with Germany for a non-binding political declaration is insufficient to address the urgent threat posed by fully autonomous weapons. Ms. Simpere called on France to support the negotiation of a treaty that would provide clear definitions and regulations for states, companies, and investors; establish strong monitoring mechanisms; and stigmatise the weapons. France should not wait to act until there is complete consensus or the first victims are harmed, said Ms. Simpere.

Dr. Matjaz Gams, executive board member of the Slovenian Artificial Intelligence Society and a computer scientist, discussed the artificial intelligence and robotics sector in Slovenia, and the dangers that autonomous weapons pose for human society. Artificial intelligence (AI) provides phenomenal possibilities for human society, but also dangers. Dr. Gams argued that it is up to scientists to call out the dangers, to campaigns to build political movement, and that if states stand together, it is possible to succeed in preventing the harm from fully autonomous weapons systems.

The final speaker, Ms. Laura Nolan, an Irish software engineer who resigned from Google in protest over their involvement with Project Maven, presented concerns from a technologist’s perspective. Ms. Nolan stressed that while the public often think about “general artificial intelligence” all of the real progress made in AI has actually been in “vertical artificial intelligence” which constitutes a practice known as pattern matching that can solve one specific problem. Application of vertical artificial intelligence would not work in a conflict environment, Ms. Nolan argued, where there is “noise” and likelihood of hacking and jamming. Ms. Nolan reminded the room that artificial intelligence cannot understand the world, cannot be held accountable, cannot explain itself, and cannot judge proportionality or military necessity—it is simply following patterns and has no real “understanding” of itself or its surroundings.

The audience raised questions how human control could be technically implemented, how autonomous weapons systems could be transparently and effectively tested, and what is preventing European states from moving to negotiations when there is general agreement on the need for human control.