Very	Human Rights Watch	Yes
The threat from new and emerging technology	**Conflict or political violence**	**Short**
Global catastrophic risks mitigated	**Risk multipliers managed**	**Implementation timeframe**

DETAILS

Human Rights Watch co-founded and serves as global coordinator of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, the international coalition of more than 140 non-governmental organizations in more than 60 countries. The Campaign is working to ban fully autonomous weapons, and retain meaningful human control over the use of force. The Campaign views such a treaty as a humanitarian imperative, legal necessity, and moral obligation.

Since 2012, Human Rights Watch has published numerous reports outlining various concerns with killer robots:

"Losing Humanity: The Case Against Killer Robots" (November 2012): This 50-page report outlines concerns about fully autonomous weapons, which would inherently lack human qualities that provide legal and non-legal checks on the killing of civilians. https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/11/19/losing-humanity/case-against-killer-robots

"Review of the 2012 US Policy on Autonomy in Weapons Systems" (April 2013): This 9-page report analyzes the strengths and weaknesses of the November 2012 US Department of Defense directive on autonomy in weapons systems. https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/15/review-2012-us-policy-autonomy-weapons-systems

"The Need for New Law to Ban Fully Autonomous Weapons" (November 2013): This 16-page report shows why existing international humanitarian law is insufficient to deal with fully autonomous weapons and why an international, legally binding instrument preemptively banning these weapons is needed. https://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/13/need-new-law-ban-fully-autonomous-weapons

"Shaking the Foundations: The Human Rights Implications of Killer Robots" (May 2014): This 26-page report assesses in detail the risks posed by fully autonomous weapons under international human rights law, expanding the debate beyond the battlefield to law enforcement operations. https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/05/12/shaking-foundations/human-rights-implications-killer-robots

"Mind the Gap: The Lack of Accountability for Killer Robots" (April 2015): This 38-page report details the significant hurdles to assigning personal accountability for the actions of fully autonomous weapons under both criminal and civil law. It also elaborates on the consequences of failing to assign legal responsibility. https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/04/09/mind-gap/lack-accountability-killer-robots

"Precedent for Preemption: The Ban on Blinding Lasers as a Model for a Killer Robots Prohibition" (November 2015): This 18-page report reviews the history of the negotiations of Protocol IV to the Convention on Conventional Weapons on Blinding Laser Weapons, which preemptively banned a weapon still in development. The report examines the parallels between the concerns about blinding lasers and fully autonomous weapons. https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/08/precedent-preemption-ban-blinding-lasers-model-killer-robots-prohibition

"Killer Robots and the Concept of Meaningful Human Control" (April 2016): This 16-page report calls for requiring meaningful human control over the selection and engagement of targets in order to protect human dignity, ensure compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law, and avoid creating an accountability gap. It also identifies legal precedent for obliging countries to maintain human control. https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/11/killer-robots-and-concept-meaningful-human-control

"Making the Case: The Dangers of Killer Robots and the Need for a Preemptive Ban" (December 2016): This 49-page

The dangers posed by the lowering meaningful human control from the use of force demand that states urgently launch negotiations to preemptively ban fully autonomous weapons. Only a new international treaty can protect humanity from this dangerous application of emerging technology.

report rebuts 16 key arguments against a ban on fully autonomous weapons. In so doing, it comprehensively

https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/09/making-case/dangers-killer-robots-and-need-preemptive-ban

"Heed the Call: A Moral and Legal Imperative to Ban Killer Robots" (August 2018): This 46-page report demonstrates how fully autonomous weapons violate the principles of humanity and the dictates of public conscience as established by the Martens Clause under international humanitarian law.

https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/08/21/heed-call/moral-and-legal-imperative-ban-killer-robots

The United States, as well as China, Israel, South Korea, Russia, and the United Kingdom are already deploying precursors to fully autonomous weapons and investing heavily in military applications of artificial intelligence and autonomy. Many countries, international experts, and roboticists have raised concerns about the dangers fully autonomous weapons would pose, including the lack of adequate accountability and the threat to global peace and security. Additionally, a growing number of countries have called for a ban, including 30 states that have endorsed the call by the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots, a coalition of 70 nongovernmental organizations in 50 countries, launched in April 2013. Many countries participating in regional bodies such as the Organisation of American States and Pan-African Parliament.

There are widespread doubts about the capacity of existing international humanitarian and human rights law to protect civilians, indeed humanity, from fully autonomous weapons. International humanitarian and human rights law was written for humans, not machines, it must be strengthened by the creation of a new international treaty. Such a treaty would clarify states' obligations and make explicit the requirements for compliance. It would minimize questions about legality by standardizing rules across countries and reducing the need for case-by-case determinations. Greater legal clarity would lead to more effective enforcement because countries would better understand the unlawfulness of fully autonomous weapons and the threat they pose to civilians.

Public calls to ban killer robots are intensifying, confirming the need for urgent action by states. A December 2018 poll found that more than three in five respondents oppose the development and use of fully autonomous weapons. More recently, an October 2018 poll in 10 European states found that seven in ten respondents believe that their country should support the efforts to ban fully autonomous weapons.

Fully autonomous weapons raise a myriad of serious concerns, not least that they would cross a moral line for humanity. Fully autonomous weapons would lack the human qualities necessary to meet the rules of international humanitarian law. Human emotions, compassion, and subjective decision making can provide an important check on the killing of civilians. The use of fully autonomous weapons also raises serious questions of accountability. Given that such a robot could identify a target and launch an attack under its own power, it is unclear who should be held responsible for any unlawful actions it commits. Lack of accountability would fail to deter future legal violations law and to provide victims meaningful justice.

The Martens Clause, which appears in Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions, mandates that the "principles of humanity" and "dictates of public conscience" be considered in cases not explicitly covered by other protocols. Fully autonomous weapons raise serious concerns under these standards. Fully autonomous weapons would lack human emotions, including compassion. Such emotions help to protect individuals who are not lawful targets in an armed conflict; fully autonomous weapons would instead lack ethical restraint and would not be constrained by the natural urge of soldiers not to kill. Public opinion surveys have shown that the vast majority of respondents disagree with the prospect of delegating life and death decisions to machines.

A treaty to ban fully autonomous weapons would also address aspects of proliferation not covered under international humanitarian law, which addresses the use of weapons but not development and production. It would help avoid proliferation and avert an arms race by halting development before it goes too far.

Human Rights Watch urges all states to launch negotiations on a new international treaty to prohibit fully autonomous weapons and retain meaningful human control over the use of force.