



Autonomous Weapons Systems: *Ensuring Human Control Based on Respect for the Dignity of Life*



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This June marked the eighty-first anniversary of humanity's shared pledge, inscribed in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations, to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Yet today, circumstances have arisen that threaten to erode the international community's decades-long efforts at their very foundation. As conflicts and the use of military force continue to spread across Ukraine, the Middle East, and Africa—including the protracted crisis in Sudan—the basic tenets of international humanitarian law are routinely and deliberately being violated.

Further compounding these concerns is the rapid development and deployment of weapons incorporating emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI). If these dangerous and inhumane trends continue, the threshold for the use of force will be significantly lowered, threatening the lives and dignity of countless people. In response, the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) urgently calls for an international regulatory framework governing Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS), and a comprehensive prohibition on systems designed to select and engage human targets.

AWS—also referred to in international discourse as Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS)—are capable of selecting and applying force to targets independent of human control or meaningful oversight. International discussions aimed at establishing clear prohibitions and restrictions on such systems are approaching a critical stage. Following a joint statement at the September 2025 meeting of the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS, support for a legally binding instrument grew to 70 states by the March 2026 GGE meeting. A decisive moment has now been reached ahead of the Seventh Review Conference of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) scheduled for November 2026.

This momentum is supported by the joint appeal from UN Secretary-General António Guterres and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) President Mirjana Spoljaric calling for new legal restrictions. The SGI strongly supports these appeals and has actively advocated for regulation since 2018 as a member of the Stop Killer Robots (SKR) coalition. In 2021, the SGI also joined other religious groups in issuing a joint interfaith statement affirming that an urgent rejection of fully autonomous weapons is essential to preserving our shared humanity.

The ethical and legal imperative for regulation is rooted in the core principle of respect for the dignity of life. In 2014, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023) warned: “Robotic weapons, when given a command to attack automatically go on killing, without the intervention of human will, and accordingly, with no possibility of pangs of conscience or remorse”. He stressed that such weapons are underpinned by the cold logic of complete annihilation of assumed enemies.

In his 2019 peace proposal, Ikeda further highlighted the “ethical disconnect” inherent in LAWS, which completely isolates the initiator of an attack from the actual combat operation, removing the possibility of moral reckoning involving feelings such as remorse and resolve that are essential for rebuilding peaceful relations. Guided by this

insight, the SGI has consistently advocated for both the prohibition and regulation of AWS out of concern for the deeply inhumane nature of such systems that lack meaningful human control.

These moral concerns are increasingly shared by global religious leadership. In May 2026, Pope Leo XIV issued a grave warning against AI-enabled weapons in his encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, writing: "AI does not remove the intrinsic inhumanity of conflict; indeed, it can only bring about conflict more quickly and render it more impersonal, lowering the threshold for resorting to violence, transforming defense into threat prediction and thus reducing victims to data". He cautioned that AI accustoms us to the dangerous idea that violence is inevitable and needs only to be optimized. The SGI deeply resonates with this warning, firmly believing that decisions with far-reaching implications for human life must never be delegated to AI.

At successive GGE meetings, there has been increasing support for ensuring “meaningful human control” and “context-appropriate human judgement” over the use of weapons. Decisions concerning attacks must never be left solely to machines; human involvement and the retention of legal responsibility are indispensable. Amid these developments, the SGI firmly aligns with the ICRC’s proposal

to include a provision prohibiting antipersonnel AWS to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, technical and human rights risks inherent in AI algorithms cannot be ignored. AWS reduce human beings to mere “data”—a digital erasure of humanity that trivializes the taking of life. In addition to “black box” opacity and algorithmic “hallucinations,” AI risks amplifying existing social biases related to ethnicity and race. Classifying and profiling people based on behavioral patterns could result in AWS targeting individuals based on an arbitrary presumption of “inherent criminality,” leading to automated killing.

We must firmly reject the argument that greater targeting precision justifies AWS. As Daisaku Ikeda noted in 2015, without the effort to see things through the eyes of others, our own ideas of justice can easily become a threat to the dignity of others. In May 2024, an international colloquium in Geneva commemorated the 75th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, highlighting international humanitarian law as a “common heritage of humanity.” If attacks become semi-automated through the unchecked use of AWS, the restraining force of human conscience—which underpins this heritage and international law—would be entirely lost.

Buddhist teachings offer lessons on war and peace in many

forms. One notable example is the parable of the "kalpa of weapons" in the Dirghagama, which tells how the abandonment of governance centered on people's well-being led to social and moral collapse, eventually plunging the world into an age of indiscriminate violence. Yet even amid relentless bloodshed, some refused to join the cycle of killing, declaring, "If you do not harm me, I will not harm you." Their example gradually restored compassion, renewed peace, and enabled society to recover. In modern warfare, should the deployment of autonomous weapons systems (AWS) become standard practice, the moral weight of humanity's earnest vow not to harm others risks being stripped of its meaning. While safeguarding national security is an essential responsibility of every state, the international community must draw a clear line against new weapons that fundamentally threaten humanity's universal right to life.

The next GGE meeting is scheduled from August 31 to September 4, 2026. Building on the joint statement supported by 70 states, we urge that this final session set out a clear policy to launch treaty negotiations incorporating a ban on antipersonnel AWS, ensuring that the power to bring armed conflict to an end is never taken out of human hands.

To read the full text of the statement, visit sgi-peace.org.