



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



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*“To save succeeding generations from the scourge of war,
which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to
humanity.”*

This June marked the eighty-first anniversary of humanity’s shared pledge, inscribed in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations—a pledge born from profound and painful reflection on the two world wars, which claimed the precious lives of people across the world.

Since the founding of the United Nations, the international community has continued to pursue efforts toward conflict resolution and peacebuilding, even in the face of repeated crises, including the prolonged division of the world during the Cold War. The conclusion of various disarmament treaties has likewise advanced step by step, aided by the strong support of civil society.

Today, however, circumstances have arisen that threaten to erode the international community's decades-long efforts at their very foundation. In recent years, as conflicts and the use of military force continue to spread across Ukraine, the Middle East, Africa and other regions, the situation warned of by organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)—in which “the basic tenets of international humanitarian law are routinely and deliberately being violated”—shows no sign of abating.

As a result, countless numbers of civilians, including children, women, older persons, and those suffering from illness, continue to suffer the devastating consequences of these conflicts time and time again.

Further compounding these concerns is the fact that ongoing conflicts are serving as a catalyst for the rapid development and deployment of weapons incorporating emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI). This situation, which the ICRC has warned reflects “a brutal pattern of warfare, exacerbated by drones and advanced weaponry,” is evident in the protracted conflict in Sudan, where civilians have been subjected to relentless attacks.

“SGI calls for the urgent establishment of an international regulatory framework governing Autonomous Weapons

Systems, including those employing AI, and a comprehensive prohibition on systems designed to select and engage human targets.”

If these dangerous and inhumane trends continue, the threshold for the use of force will be significantly lowered, potentially leading to the further spread of tragedies that threaten the lives and dignity of countless people.

Against this backdrop, the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) calls in this statement for the urgent establishment of an international regulatory framework governing Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS), including those employing artificial intelligence (AI), and, above all, for a comprehensive prohibition on systems designed to select and engage human targets.

Growing Number of States Calling for the Start of Treaty Negotiations

AWS are generally defined as weapons systems capable of selecting and applying force to targets independent of human control or meaningful oversight. Today, concern is mounting within the international community, fueled not only by the unchecked development of such systems in many countries, but also by the fact that concerning levels of autonomy have already become a reality in some instances.

In international discourse, AWS are also referred to as Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS).[1] International discussions aimed at establishing clear regulations and prohibitions on such systems are now approaching a critical stage. Following a joint statement at the September 2025 meeting of the Group of

Governmental Experts (GGE) on LAWS, in which 42 states expressed their readiness to pursue negotiations on a legally binding instrument on their use, support for the initiative 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.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and the President of the ICRC, Mirjana Spoljaric, have issued a joint appeal calling on states to commence negotiations on a new legally binding instrument that would establish clear prohibitions and restrictions on AWS.

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— Pope Leo XIV, "*Magnifica Humanitas*"

In May 2026, Pope Leo XIV likewise issued a grave warning against AI-enabled weapons in his encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas: On Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence*, 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. In this way, it will accustom us to the idea that violence is inevitable and needs only to be optimized."

We in the SGI deeply support these appeals and the concerns they raise, as they resonate deeply with the principle of the dignity of life that lies at the very heart of the Buddhism we embrace. We firmly believe that decisions and judgments of grave importance—those that have far-reaching implications for human life and dignity—must never be delegated to AI.

Since 2018, the SGI has been a member of the *Stop Killer Robots* (SKR) coalition, a global civil society campaign advocating the prohibition and regulation of AWS, and has promoted grassroots awareness through initiatives including support for the promotion and screening of the documentary film *Immoral Code*, which brings into sharp focus the profound ethical questions such weapons pose under international humanitarian law.

In addition, the SGI has worked with other faith groups to raise concerns about AWS from moral and ethical perspectives. For instance, in 2021 the SGI joined the World Council of Churches and other religious groups in issuing a joint interfaith statement on Killer Robots, *A Plea for Preserving Our Shared Humanity*, affirming that “an urgent and firm rejection of the development of fully autonomous weapons is essential to preserving our shared humanity.” Furthermore, through statements delivered at numerous international conferences and forums, the SGI has continued to warn of the dangers posed by AWS, which reduce human beings to mere data points and risk entrenching patterns of dehumanization.

Attacks Without Conscience or Hesitation

In light of these developments, it is worth recalling that in 2014, the year that the first Informal Meeting of Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems was held in Geneva under the framework of the CCW, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda (1928–2023) issued the following warning in his dialogue with peace scholar Dr. Kevin Clements:

“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. They present an extremely grave threat, particularly from a humanitarian perspective. The possession of such weapons, just like that of nuclear weapons, is underpinned by the cold logic of the utter and complete annihilation of assumed enemies, with no discrimination between civilians and combatants.” [2]

It was from this profound sense of concern that President Ikeda called for the prompt establishment of an international regulatory framework prohibiting the development and deployment of such weapons. At the time, AWS integrating AI and other emerging technologies were still widely regarded as “weapons of the future,” and international recognition of the need for urgent regulatory action remained limited. Today, however, they are no longer a distant possibility but an increasingly immediate and present threat.

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development and operational use of weapons is indispensable.”

At successive GGE meetings on LAWS, there has been increasing support for ensuring “meaningful human control” over the use of such weapons. At the March meeting, there was growing recognition that this principle should be strengthened further by making “context-appropriate human judgment and control” a fundamental tenet, taking into account the circumstances and environment in which weapons are deployed alongside the requirements of international humanitarian law.

In other words, decisions concerning attacks must never be left solely to machines; and meaningful human involvement throughout the development and operational use of weapons—including the retention of legal responsibility for their use—is indispensable.

Amid these developments, at the aforementioned March meeting, the ICRC proposed that the instrument include a provision prohibiting antipersonnel AWS, emphasizing that such a measure is essential to ensuring compliance with international humanitarian law. The SKR coalition has backed this proposal and is calling on governments to establish legal and ethical rules to prevent humanity from continuing its dangerous drift toward automated killing.

The SGI firmly aligns itself with this position. We therefore urge that the prohibition of AWS designed to target human beings be established as a key pillar of the international regulatory framework governing such systems.

The next meeting of the GGE is scheduled to take place from August 31 to September 4, 2026. Building on the joint statement now supported by 70 states, we hope that constructive deliberations will be pursued at this final session, and that the report will be submitted to the November Review Conference of the CCW, setting out a clear policy to launch negotiations on a treaty that incorporates a ban on antipersonnel AWS.

President Daisaku Ikeda's Insight into LAWS

In his [2019 peace proposal](#), Daisaku Ikeda offered the following insight, highlighting what he regarded as the defining ethical challenge posed by LAWS:

“If LAWS were to be left unregulated or even actually used, the nature of combat would be fundamentally transformed. Fully autonomous weapon systems create not only a physical disconnect—the situation in which those who direct attacks and those who are targeted are not in the same place, as already seen in the case of drone strikes—but also an ethical disconnect, completely isolating the initiator of the attack from the actual combat operation.”

Drawing a contrast with the recollection of former German President Richard von Weizsäcker (1920–2015) of encountering enemy forces during the Second World War—“Since all the men facing each other across the battle lines worried chiefly about their own survival, we can assume that our foes were not so different from ourselves”—President Ikeda raised concerns from two perspectives about the danger that LAWS could fundamentally alter the very nature of armed conflict: First, once such weapons are deployed,

would there remain any possibility of refraining—even if only for a moment—from launching an attack, prompted by a recognition of the complex web of emotions that transcends the divisions between friend and foe, and our shared humanity? Moreover, in the aftermath of combat conducted by LAWS, would there be any room for the moral reckoning that has traditionally accompanied human conflict, i.e., profound remorse for one’s own actions, a deep sense of anguish at the suffering caused by war, and the heartfelt resolve, as human beings, to rebuild peaceful relations for the sake of future generations?

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.

The Danger and Suffering Caused by Trivializing Human Life

In terms of their inherent inhumanity, discussions at international forums have repeatedly raised concerns that these systems may undermine international humanitarian law, which prohibits attacks against civilians and the use of weapons that inflict indiscriminate harm. They have also warned that the introduction of AWS designed to minimize casualties on the attacking side could significantly lower the threshold for the use of military force.

Alongside such humanitarian concerns, the SGI has continued to warn, from the Buddhist perspective of the dignity of life, that AWS reduce those subjected to attack to mere “data.” Such a digital erasure of humanity risks trivializing the taking of life and the

immense suffering inherent in war, striking at the very foundations of the dignity of life itself.

Moreover, the intrinsic risks of AWS have been repeatedly highlighted. These include the frequently documented problem that these systems may generate incorrect or misleading outputs based on inaccurate information or erroneous interpretations—a phenomenon known as “hallucinations”—as well as the “black box” problem, whereby the processes through which systems learn, process information, and reach decisions remain opaque to human understanding. Harms caused by such misidentification or unforeseen malfunctions, as well as attacks by AWS lacking moral or legal accountability, could result in the loss of family members and friends—each an irreplaceable presence to those who love them.

From a human rights perspective, the SGI has repeatedly brought to the forefront of international discourse the risk that AI algorithms may not only reflect existing social biases, including those related to ethnicity, race, and other aspects of identity, but also amplify them. In particular, there is a grave danger that classifying people into fixed categories and profiling them based on their characteristics and behavioral patterns could result in individuals being targeted by AWS on the basis of a presumption of “inherent criminality”—that is, the arbitrary assumption that members of a particular group will act in a certain way in the future.

Humanity's Common Heritage Underpins International Humanitarian Law

In addition to our deep concern for the inhumanity inherent in AWS, there is a further danger of profound significance that we wish to draw attention to: namely, that if AWS are to become a mainstream means of warfare without robust international regulation, the power to bring armed conflict to an end will be fundamentally taken out of human hands. As civilian casualties continue to rise and inhumane attacks become increasingly frequent in conflicts around the world, concern over the state of international law, including international humanitarian law, has reached unprecedented levels.

If attacks involving civilians were to become semiautomated in conflicts through the unchecked use of AWS, the restraining force of human conscience—which has long served as a foundation supporting international law—would be entirely lost.

In May 2024, an international colloquium was held at the ICRC headquarters in Geneva to commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, the cornerstone of international humanitarian law, focusing on its significance as a common heritage of humanity.

As the expression “a common heritage of humanity” implies, diverse religions, traditions, and cultures throughout history have played a foundational role in shaping the norms that preserve humanity in times of war. The ideal of protecting humanity in war is one that was cultivated long before it became a universal norm of international law. In order to ensure that this norm remains enduring, it is

essential that we once again turn our attention to the ideals and values that have been passed down as humanity's spiritual heritage.

A Buddhist Parable on Restoring Peace

Buddhist teachings offer lessons on war and peace in a variety of forms. A notable example is the parable of the “kalpa of weapons,” or age of armaments, in the Dirghagama, a collection of early Buddhist sutras. It tells of how a king's abandonment of the long-established laws that placed the people's well-being first gradually led to social and moral decay. Eventually, people sought to attack anyone they encountered, just as a hunter, upon seeing a herd of deer, seeks to kill indiscriminately. As a result, the world entered the “kalpa of weapons,” causing the human lifespan to diminish drastically.

Yet, even amid such extreme conditions of unrelenting violence, there were those who resisted being drawn into the cycle of bloodshed, declaring, “If you do not harm me, I will not harm you.” When the survivors later encountered one another, they rejoiced, exclaiming, “You are alive! You are alive!” and welcomed even complete strangers as though they were members of their own family. It was through the example of those who resisted that the spirit of compassion gradually returned to society, peace was restored, and the human lifespan was once again prolonged.

In modern warfare, should the deployment of AWS become standard practice, the moral weight of humanity's earnest vow not to harm others will be stripped of its very meaning. While safeguarding national security is an essential responsibility for every state, we strongly urge the international community to draw a clear line against

new weapons that fundamentally threaten humanity's universal right to life.

Preventing Destruction and Division Through a Shift in Perspective

Among states that remain reluctant to regulate AWS, it is often argued that greater targeting precision can help reduce civilian casualties. Yet if other states were to likewise develop and deploy such weapons, and they were used against one's own people in a future conflict, could such weapons truly be considered acceptable?

Though addressing a different issue from that of disarmament, Daisaku Ikeda offered the following insight into human rights in his [*2015 peace proposal*](#), calling for a radical shift in perspective:

“There is no one who would find violence or oppression based on prejudice directed at them or their families acceptable. But when it is directed at other ethnicities or populations, it is not unusual for people to consider it justified by some fault or failing on the part of the victims.

This makes it all the more important that people exert themselves to understand the other and see things through their eyes. Without such efforts, particularly in times of heightened tensions, it is all too easy for our own ideas of what constitutes peace or justice to become a threat to the lives and dignity of others.”

We believe that if deliberations among states on the regulation and prohibition of AWS are to become more constructive, it will be essential to reexamine the issue through such a shift in perspective.

The SGI has actively pursued interfaith and intercultural dialogue to address global issues, including disarmament and human rights, while consistently promoting grassroots cultural and educational exchanges. This work stems from our long-held conviction that transforming how we perceive one another—through dialogue and exchange that transcend the framework of the nation-state—is indispensable to opening pathways to world peace and broadening the global network of solidarity dedicated to overcoming humanity's shared challenges.

By their very nature, issues related to peace—much like human rights—must be pursued with the aim of ensuring that all people are equally protected. It is on this basis that we must act if humanity is to avoid being led toward destruction and division.

The SGI is determined to work alongside the states calling for the regulation and prohibition of AWS, the ICRC, and the many civil society organizations and religious leaders participating in the Stop Killer Robots coalition. By expanding global solidarity among ordinary people, with the younger generation who will shape the future at its core, we aim to build a powerful groundswell of support for the adoption of a legally binding treaty.

[1] United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), "Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems," <https://www.unoda.org/en/our-work/emerging-challenges/lethal-autonomous-weapon-systems> (accessed July 24, 2026).

[2] Kevin P. Clements and Daisaku Ikeda, *Toward a Century of Peace: A Dialogue on the Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding* (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 141.