

Public Opinion on the Ethics and Governance of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems:
Open Roboethics initiative Statement for the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons
(CCW) Meeting of the States Parties, Geneva

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Delivered by AJung Moon

Thank you, Mr. President.

Distinguished Delegates,

I am grateful to be speaking to you on behalf of the Open Roboethics initiative. The Open Roboethics initiative is a think tank based in Canada that takes *stakeholder-inclusive* approaches to investigating roboethics issues. What should a robot do? What decisions are we comfortable delegating to robots? These are some of the questions we have been exploring in the domain of self-driving vehicles, care robots, as well as lethal autonomous weapons systems, or LAWS.

I would like to share with you some of the key findings from a public opinion survey we conducted this year on the topic of LAWS. As the CCW continues its discussion of LAWS, I believe the Distinguished Delegates will find the results of our survey informative in moving the discussions forward, especially in consideration of the Martens Clause that underscores the importance of the public's role in these discussions.

While existing public opinion surveys on this topic have mainly been limited to English-speaking populations, our survey was launched in 14 different languages and have attracted over a 1000 responses from 54 countries.

The following are some of our findings:

In general, when our participants were asked to think from the perspective of an aggressor, 71% of our participants indicated that they would rather have their country use *remotely operated weapons systems* instead of LAWS when waging war. From the perspective of a target of aggression, a majority has also indicated that they would rather be under attack by remotely operated than autonomous weapons systems.

When asked about international ban across different types of lethal autonomous weapons for missions on land, air, and sea, 67% of our participants indicated that all types of lethal

autonomous systems should be internationally banned, while 14% said that none of such systems should be banned.

When asked about the development and use of LAWS, 85% of our participants were *not in support* of using lethal autonomous weapons for *offensive* purposes. In addition, majority of our participants were also against the development of LAWS for both defensive and offensives purposes.

Given a list of common reasons for *supporting* the development and use of LAWS, the most supported reason was to save human military personnel from physical harm of war. However, more participants indicated that there are *no valid reasons* for developing or using LAWS over a remotely operated alternative.

Given a list of reasons for *rejecting* the technology, the most support went to the assertion that *humans* should always be the ones to make life/death decisions. This particular principled reasoning has been echoed in other studies.

As acknowledged by scholars, experts, and civil society, there is no agreement on the definition and interpretation of the term “public conscience” referred to in the Martens Clause. It would also be inappropriate to equate results of a single public opinion survey as an accurate measure of public conscience. However, it is also clear that we cannot exercise the requirement of “the dictates of public conscience” without proactively listening to and taking into account the voice of the public.

Based on this year’s data, it is our conclusion that the public is reluctant to endorse development and use of LAWS for waging war. However, at the moment, data on the perception of the technology from non-English speaking countries remain scarce. Our results suggests that *more* systematic, international public engagement is necessary to support the requirements set out in the Martens Clause.

As part of our on-going efforts to understand and engage the public on this challenging issue, we plan to continue to conduct studies in this domain across the world. In the interest of time, I shared with you only some of the findings from our study. I invite you to visit our website, www.openroboethics.org for more detailed report of our findings.

Thank you,

AJung Moon
Co-founder, Open Roboethics initiative