



Taking the next step, protecting humanity: Launching negotiations in 2026 for new law on autonomous weapons

August 2026

This November, at the Review Conference of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), states have the opportunity to show they are committed to multilateralism and international law as strong responses to escalating tensions and the humanitarian risks of new technologies. They must mandate negotiations on a legal instrument on autonomous weapons.

Autonomous weapons systems are now being deployed to the battlefield, for example in [Ukraine](#). Military AI more broadly has been linked in reports to serious harm to civilians - for example, in deployments by the US in [Iran](#), and by Israel in [Gaza](#). Public alarm is growing.

But, states still have time to act to put legal restrictions on autonomous weapons systems. The international community now has a strong basis of common ground with which to make new law.

Progress that allows a move to negotiations

To date, [130 countries](#) have expressed their support for an international legally binding instrument to regulate autonomous weapons systems. Over a decade of work in international discussions, [regional](#) and national initiatives has built strong understandings of the problem, the necessary [solution](#) in regulation, and the majority's commitment to achieving this.

States also now have a text that can be used as a starting point for negotiating an instrument. A growing number and broad range of states have expressed their [readiness to move forward](#) to negotiations based on the text of elements of an instrument on autonomous weapons systems that has been under development at the CCW Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. [Over 70 states, including 66 CCW High Contracting Parties](#), have now stated this.

States' mandate to "formulate, by consensus, a set of elements of an instrument" at the GGE comes to an end this year. The CCW Review Conference in November 2026 represents an inflection point for taking common understandings and commitment forward to action.

Timeline and procedures for the remainder of 2026

- **During the final GGE session in August/September** and its informal consultations, the Chair will share a draft report of the GGE's work for the Review Conference, including the text of elements for an instrument. States must ensure this text is only strengthened, not cut down or weakened, and should support it as a basis for negotiations.
- **During the First Committee of the UN General Assembly in October/November** states should express their support for and intention to urgently commence negotiations.
- **At the CCW Review Conference in November** states should support a mandate for the negotiation of a Protocol to the Convention, on autonomous weapons systems. If such a mandate cannot be agreed by consensus, states can also take the procedural option of

making a proposal under [Article 8 of the Convention](#) to negotiate a Protocol. On receipt of a written proposal from a state or group of states, the UN Secretary-General, as CCW Depository, will write to all High Contracting Parties for their views on it. If a majority agree (65 or more High Contracting Parties), a negotiating conference will be convened. Such a conference would be open to all states, not just High Contracting Parties.

Nothing less than negotiations as the next step

With autonomous weapons reaching the battlefield; broad support for legal rules; and a widely supported text that gives a starting point for their negotiation, nothing less than a move to negotiating a legally binding instrument is acceptable in 2026. It has never been more feasible - nor more urgent - to take this step.

New weapons technologies and military tools are threatening core and longstanding principles of international law. States can reaffirm these principles through turning the elements they have been discussing at the GGE into legal rules. If not all states wish to join this effort, those that still value international law must undertake it nevertheless. They must do so: to protect key norms and principles; to reassert confidence-building and rule-making as effective ways for dealing with international challenges; and to protect civilians living through modern conflicts.

To make legal rules that truly represent a step forward to protect humanity, and fully address the ethical and humanitarian problem of autonomy in weapons systems, states must go even further. Though the text at the GGE contains key elements that could be used for agreeing cornerstone rules on meaningful human control, states have not addressed the critical ethical and legal issue of anti-personnel autonomous weapons systems. These must be prohibited. And, as discussions have become increasingly focused on compliance with international law, the broader importance of meaningful human control in the use of force risks being downplayed. These issues and more must be addressed during negotiations on a legal instrument.

For now, states must ensure that negotiations are launched this year. Further discussion to reach greater consensus at the CCW is not enough. At this point, further agreement should be reached through the process of negotiations. A mandate must be for negotiations on a **legal** instrument. It must be time-limited: given the progress made, one year is sufficient. With development and use advancing, states must move fast.

Key recommendations to states:

- Ensure the CCW GGE text of elements of an instrument is strengthened, not cut down or weakened, and support it as a basis for the negotiation of a legal instrument.
- Launch negotiation of a legal instrument. The exact procedural route or forum used is less important than starting the process itself. States should not allow this to be blocked - and their years of work wasted - by those who prefer eroding norms to building them.
- During negotiations, address the need to prohibit anti-personnel systems, as well as other issues currently not under discussion at the GGE.

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