



The Canadian Council of Churches Commission on Justice and Peace
Statement on Autonomous Weapons
May 2022

The Honourable Mélanie Joly, MP
Minister of Foreign Affairs

Dear Minister Joly:

The Commission on Justice and Peace of The Canadian Council of Churches calls on the Canadian government to support international efforts to ban fully autonomous weapons systems. Such systems make decisions over human lives with little human control and cannot properly value human life.

The Commission on Justice and Peace of the Canadian Council of Churches—a broad and inclusive ecumenical body representing 26 member churches throughout Canada—provides a forum for Christian churches to share information and concerns among those involved in ecumenical work on peace and social justice in Canada and the world. As a commission involved in such work, we express deep concern regarding the development of weapon systems that lack meaningful human control. We support the joint statement entitled "[A Plea for Preserving Our Shared Humanity](#),"¹ by the World Council of Churches, Pax Christi Northern California, and Soka Gakkai International, and affirm that the "urgent and firm rejection of the development of fully autonomous weapons is essential to preserving our shared humanity."

At the core of our concern is the conviction that autonomous weapon systems undermine human dignity and treat human lives as lines of code. Artificial intelligence (AI) enhanced machines cannot understand the value of human life and should not be given the power to take it away. Machines, regardless of their sophistication, do not possess the uniquely human capacity for empathy, mercy, solidarity, friendship and creativity.

A minimum requirement then for ensuring human dignity is that human lives cannot be treated as disposable objects. Any decisions with the possible consequence of ending human lives must be made by fellow humans who can be held accountable for their actions. Ensuring this requirement of human dignity means avoiding mindless killing that treats human lives as data points and not as sacred.

¹ A Plea for Preserving Our Shared Humanity February 2021 <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/interfaith-statement-on-killer-robots>



While new technologies, such as AI, offer communities a new set of tools to better connect with each other and address a number of global challenges, those technologies cannot be allowed to lead to a digital dehumanization. Delegating the decision over human lives to machines and algorithms is a *malum in se*, a wrong by nature, in and of itself, and needs to be prohibited.

As a Commission of the Canadian Council of Churches, we reflect biblically and theologically on peace and social justice; facilitate the cooperation of the churches in peace and justice concerns; and assist the Council and its member churches in their advocacy efforts where appropriate. We believe this is a moment for such assistance and offer this statement urging respect for human dignity and preserving our shared humanity.

Please be assured of our continued prayers for you and the Government of Canada, that justice may be upheld, and that peace may prevail.

Donna Geernaert s.c.

Donna Geernaert, SC, Chair: The Commission on Justice and Peace

cc.

The Honourable Rob Oliphant, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
Maninder Sidhu, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs
Hon. Michael Chong, Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Conservative Party of Canada
Ziad Aboultaif, Deputy Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Conservative Party of Canada
Heather McPherson, Critic - Foreign Affairs, New Democratic Party of Canada
Don Davies, Deputy Critic - Foreign Affairs, New Democratic Party of Canada
Stéphane Bergeron, Porte-parole d'affaires étrangères, Bloc Québécois
Amita Kuttner, Interim Leader – Green Party of Canada

Rev. Dr, Das Sydney, President, The Canadian Council of Churches

Rev. Peter Noteboom, General Secretary, The Canadian Council of Churches

Peter Prove, Director of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission of the Churches
on International Affairs