EKIN SNY JMUN BACKGROUND GUIDE

Committee: The General Assembly First Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Topic: The International Regulation of Autonomous Weapons Systems and Lethal AI in Armed Conflict

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Letter from the Chairboard

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Fellow Delegates,

We are very excited to welcome you to the United Nations General Assembly First Committee (GA1) – Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) and to guide you throughout this committee's sessions.

We hope that you will take the time to read this background guide carefully, as it has been thoughtfully prepared to assist you in navigating this complex topic and to enhance your overall committee experience. We hope that this guide will provide you with a clear and comprehensive foundation for our discussions. You may even find that some of the most valuable insights regarding this committee are hidden in the details of the guide itself.

We expect this committee to be a space for respectful, well-researched, and constructive debate. You are encouraged to come prepared, participate actively, and engage with differing perspectives diplomatically and professionally. Whether this is your first MUN conference or one of many, this committee is intended to challenge you, while also providing an opportunity for you to grow as a delegate.

We look forward to productive committee sessions full of innovative ideas, and we wish you the best of luck! We are excited to see the contributions that you will bring to DISEC!

Sincerely,

The Chairboard of the United Nations General Assembly First Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

Ms. Zineb Kissarli - Chair
Ms. Assma Awkal - Co-Chair

1. Committee and Topic Introduction

The General Assembly First Committee: Disarmament and International Security Committee

The Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC) is the First Committee of the United Nations General Assembly, headquartered in New York. It was created in 1945, in the aftermath of World War II, and currently comprises 193 Member States. DISEC serves as a primary forum for Member States to discuss and develop recommendations on matters concerning the regulation of armaments, the prevention of armed conflict, and emerging threats to international stability.

Historically, DISEC has addressed a wide range of security concerns, including nuclear non-proliferation, conventional arms control, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and the regulation of new and emerging technologies in warfare. As military capabilities evolve alongside scientific and technological advancements, the committee's work increasingly reflects the challenges posed by innovation in the defense sector.

In particular, technological progress in artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics, and automation has begun to transform modern military strategy and operations. The development of Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS), including Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), has emerged as a significant issue within international security discourse. These systems are generally understood as weapons capable of selecting and engaging targets with varying degrees of human intervention. While some systems operate under close human supervision, others may function with substantial independence once activated.

This evolving capacity has raised important legal, ethical, and strategic questions for the international community, particularly regarding the role of human decision-making in the use of force. The integration of lethal artificial intelligence (lethal AI) into armed conflict presents complex challenges under International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Core principles such as distinction, proportionality, and military necessity rely on careful assessment and judgment, traditionally exercised by human operators. As technological systems assume greater responsibility in targeting processes, questions arise regarding accountability, reliability, and compliance with established legal norms. Furthermore, the absence of a universally accepted definition of autonomy in weapons systems has complicated international discussions, as states differ in their interpretations of what constitutes sufficient human control.

Beyond legal considerations, the growing investment in military artificial intelligence has broader implications for global security and strategic stability. Several states view AI-enabled systems as a means of enhancing military efficiency and maintaining technological advantage. At the same time, concerns have been raised about the potential for increased military competition, the risk of unintended escalation, and the possibility that such systems could lower the threshold for the use of force. These developments highlight the interconnected nature of technological innovation and international peace and security.

As the primary General Assembly body responsible for disarmament and international security, DISEC is an appropriate platform for addressing these emerging concerns. The regulation of autonomous weapons systems is directly linked to the committee's mandate to prevent destabilizing arms developments and foster international cooperation in maintaining global peace.

2. The Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda

The Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) Agenda is a global policy framework adopted by the United Nations that formally recognizes the role and significance of young people in maintaining international peace and security, rather than viewing them solely as victims and/or bystanders. It was first established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) and has since been reinforced by subsequent resolutions and reports. The YPS Agenda emphasizes the positive and constructive roles that young people can play in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict recovery. It calls on Member States and international organizations to integrate youth perspectives and leadership into peace and security processes.

The YPS Agenda's five pillars reflect how the youth respond to violence and empower them as agents of peace:

Participation stresses the inclusion of youth in peace and security decision-making; **Protection** emphasizes youth rights and safety in conflict contexts; **Prevention** addresses the root causes of youth involvement in violence and aims to prevent conflict; **Partnerships** encourages cooperation between states, organizations, and youth; and **Disengagement & Reintegration** supports conflict-affected youth in rebuilding their lives.

Although the YPS Agenda was not originally conceived with autonomous weapons systems in mind, its core principles are directly applicable to the topic at hand. Youth engagement in technological governance links the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda to the regulation of autonomous weapons and lethal AI. As active stakeholders in AI ethics and future security debates, young people's meaningful participation strengthens both the participation and prevention pillars by contributing to the development of norms that limit misuse and destabilizing proliferation.

At the same time, autonomous weapons systems raise serious humanitarian and human rights concerns, making the protection pillar particularly relevant, especially for civilians and youth in conflict zones. This highlights the importance of regulatory discussions that emphasize human control, accountability, transparency, and the application of legal safeguards.

Effective regulation also depends on strong partnerships among states, civil society, and youth-led movements, ensuring inclusive and legitimate norm-building processes. Organizations and coalitions such as 'Stop Killer Robots' play an essential role in influencing policy related to lethal autonomous weapons. Ultimately, by promoting safer and more accountable technological governance, such efforts contribute to long-term stability and reintegration, reinforcing the broader objectives of the YPS Agenda.

Youth, Peace & Security

3. Topic Background

Ethical and Humanitarian Implications

AWS, which can independently select and engage targets, raise profound ethical and humanitarian concerns, particularly regarding decisions that directly affect human life. While IHL applies to all weapons, including AWS, the autonomous functions of these systems challenge fundamental IHL principles such as distinction and proportionality, which require combatants to differentiate between military targets and civilians (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), 2025; CCW High Contracting Parties, 2019).

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has repeatedly highlighted that the unconstrained development of AWS poses "serious legal, ethical, and humanitarian challenges," calling for regulatory measures to ensure meaningful human control over the use of lethal force (ICRC, 2021; ICRC, 2025). Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2025) has highlighted that AWS decision-making lacks human judgment, empathy, and moral reasoning, creating significant risks of violating international human rights standards.

Civilian protection remains a central concern in discussions on AWS. IHL obligates parties to armed conflict to distinguish between civilians and combatants while minimizing harm to non-combatants. These are requirements that autonomous systems may not reliably fulfill (UNODA, 2025; CCW High Contracting Parties, 2019). The CCW GGE underscores the importance of retaining meaningful human control over AWS to ensure that decisions regarding the use of force remain accountable. Given AWS's ability to process vast amounts of data at high speed, there is a larger risk of unintended engagements if contextual information is misinterpreted, potentially increasing civilian casualties. This risk is particularly severe in urban areas or along borders, where civilians and combatants often coexist.

When autonomous systems cause civilian harm, determining the responsibility of programmers, commanders, or states under existing legal frameworks is complicated. The ICRC has emphasized that AWS should undergo rigorous legal reviews and retain human decision-makers to preserve the chain of accountability required by IHL. Without clear mechanisms for determining responsibility, victims may be left without avenues for redress, and inconsistent interpretations of obligations could undermine international law. Establishing clear legal frameworks for accountability related to AWS use is essential for guaranteeing justice and for upholding core humanitarian principles.

3. Topic Background (Continued)

Ethical and Humanitarian Implications (Continued)

Finally, the broader legitimacy of the use of force is at stake in debates over the deployment of AWS. International experts increasingly advocate that these systems must operate under meaningful human control to prevent machines from making lethal decisions independently (ICRC, 2025; UNODA, 2025). Retaining human oversight ensures that the application of force remains grounded in ethical reasoning and legal compliance, rather than purely algorithmic determinations.

The ethical concerns also intersect with fundamental human rights, including protection from the arbitrary deprivation of life and the right to due process. In this context, developing and implementing robust ethical frameworks is essential to preserve civilian trust in the international norms governing armed conflict and to ensure that technological innovation in warfare does not come at the expense of humanity.

Addressing these ethical and humanitarian considerations is therefore central to developing comprehensive regulations that safeguard human dignity in modern conflict.

Figure: A UN peacekeeper from Nepal stands near a robotic arm used for mine clearance during a United Nations Mission in Mali in 2018. While robots assist in safely removing landmines, growing concerns surround the regulation of autonomous weapons that use Artificial Intelligence.

Real-world developments demonstrate that the capabilities of AWS are rapidly evolving. Semi-autonomous, AI-guided drones equipped with “fire, forget, and find” functions have reportedly engaged targets without continuous human oversight, raising serious concerns about civilian safety (Reuters, 2026). Such cases highlight the potential for unintended or unpredictable outcomes in conflict, underscoring the urgent need for proactive ethical and legal guidance.

As such, collaborative international efforts are essential to develop comprehensive frameworks that reinforce existing humanitarian protections and ensure that technological advancement does not compromise human dignity. Human oversight must remain central to both the design and deployment of AWS, preventing autonomous systems from making lethal decisions independently. Embedding ethical principles into regulatory frameworks helps ensure that the use of lethal force remains accountable and grounded in human judgment.

Additionally, coordinated international action is needed to establish consistent norms that balance military innovation with humanitarian responsibility. Ultimately, ethical regulation not only safeguards civilians but also preserves the core principles of IHL, demonstrating that technological progress in warfare can remain aligned with moral and legal obligations.

3. Topic Background (Continued)

AI Development in Defense and Global Cooperation

The development of AI for defense, particularly in AWS, presents a global challenge that requires coordinated international cooperation to mitigate related risks. The CCW GGE serves as a key forum in which states examine the legal, humanitarian, and governance dimensions of AWS (UNODA, 2025). The CCW framework balances IHL obligations with military necessity, while providing guidance on regulatory approaches (United Nations, 2016).

Multilateral discussions can help harmonize approaches, reduce divergence in national policies, and enable states with varying technological capacities to identify shared regulatory priorities. In the absence of cooperation, unilateral development risks fragmenting international standards and weakening the global legal order. In contrast, collaborative approaches enhance transparency and trust among states, fostering a more predictable environment for the development and deployment of AWS.

International cooperation additionally encompasses technical exchanges and the elaboration of operational guidelines that support compliance with IHL and reduce humanitarian risks. CCW GGE meetings provide a platform for states to share research on autonomous decision-making, risk assessment, and weapons testing (UNODA, 2025). These exchanges allow governments to identify scenarios in which autonomous functions may cause unintended harm and to adjust designs or policies accordingly. Furthermore, cooperative efforts promote shared concepts such as “meaningful human control,” ensuring that critical decisions remain under human oversight. The harmonization of technical standards improves accountability and predictability in AWS operations, therefore aligning technological advancement with legal and humanitarian norms.

Engaging non-state stakeholders, including research institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), further strengthens policy development and ensures evidence-based regulation. Organizations like the International Committee for Robot Arms Control (ICRAC) provide technical analyses that highlight risks related to military robotics. Civil society actors also emphasize ethical concerns, human rights implications, and technological limitations. Inclusive dialogue fosters transparency, builds confidence in multilateral frameworks, and helps shape technically feasible and enforceable policies. In other words, it ensures that diverse perspectives inform decision-making and that regulations reflect both ethical imperatives and practical realities.

Finally, global cooperation promotes strategic stability and advances arms control. Shared norms and multilateral agreements can reduce competitive pressures and prevent arms races in autonomous technologies (UNODA, 2025). Confidence-building measures and transparency initiatives further build trust among states, mitigating the risks of unintended escalation. As such, cooperative frameworks establish boundaries that balance military capability with humanitarian protection while ensuring responsible innovation.

3. Topic Background (Continued)

The Changing Nature of Conflicts

The integration of AWS and AI is fundamentally transforming armed conflict by accelerating decision-making, increasing operational speed, and reshaping battlefield dynamics. These systems reduce the time between target detection and engagement, challenging traditional military command structures that rely on human consultations. While AWS can advantageously process vast amounts of data and respond faster than humans, it risks outpacing human oversight and control. The speed and complexity of AWS increase the likelihood of unintended escalation or miscalculation, especially if autonomous systems act unpredictably.

Past conflicts involving semi-autonomous drones demonstrate how AI-enabled technologies can outpace existing international norms and military protocols, stressing the importance of understanding these developments when crafting regulatory frameworks (Reuters, 2026).

AWS also have significant implications for strategic stability among states. Countries developing and deploying advanced autonomous technologies may gain military advantages, leading competitors to accelerate their own programs and potentially fueling an arms race. Differences in technological capabilities among states influence their regulatory positions and the adoption of AWS, contributing to fragmented approaches that may heighten tensions. Confidence-building measures, transparency initiatives, and international cooperation are therefore critical to manage these risks and prevent destabilization. Without such efforts, the rapid proliferation of autonomous weaponry could undermine regional and global security. Balancing technological innovation with robust legal frameworks is essential to prevent escalation and preserve peace.

Beyond strategic considerations, autonomous technologies reshape the operational conduct of warfare. AI-assisted systems, including drones, are already used with varying degrees of human supervision in conflict zones, complicating the application of IHL and the protection of civilians (Reuters, 2026). As autonomy increases, so do the challenges of ensuring that such systems consistently comply with legal obligations, particularly the principle of distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants and minimizing harm.

The real-world deployment of these technologies highlights the need for adaptable and forward-looking regulatory frameworks that can respond to rapid technological advancements. Continuous monitoring of emerging trends is essential to inform policy decisions and ensure that governance structures anticipate how autonomy may alter hostilities.

The changing character of armed conflict demands flexible international norms that uphold human judgment and ethical standards. Maintaining meaningful human control over critical decisions ensures that warfare remains governed by IHL and human rights principles. Clear and enforceable regulations can reduce the risk of accidental engagements and unlawful outcomes, while strengthening accountability. As states and international organizations continue to explore regulatory frameworks that balance between embracing technological progress and protecting human life, harmonizing policies at the global level is critical to maintain security while supporting responsible military innovation. A comprehensive understanding of these evolving dynamics is needed for shaping regulations that promote stability, protect civilians, and uphold humanitarian goals.

4. Past International Actions

- **DISEC Resolution on Lethal Autonomous Weapons**: In December 2023, DISEC approved a draft resolution on lethal autonomous weapons systems with overwhelming support. The resolution expressed concern over the potential negative impact of such systems on global and regional stability, including the risks of arms races and the lowering of conflict thresholds. The resolution reaffirmed that international law, including the UN Charter and IHL, fully applies to AWS, and emphasized the importance of human responsibility and accountability in the use of lethal force. It further called for continued work through the CCW GGE to examine these technologies and their implications for international peace and security.

- **UN General Assembly Resolution on AWS:** On 1 December 2025, the UN General Assembly adopted another resolution on lethal autonomous weapons systems (A/RES/80/57) with significant support (164 states in favor). The resolution reaffirmed the urgent need for collective international action to address the challenges posed by autonomous and AI-enabled weapons. The resolution highlighted key risks, including escalation, destabilization, and proliferation to unauthorized actors, while emphasizing the importance of human control, accountability, and compliance with international law. It also encouraged continued reporting and information-sharing among Member States and international organizations to support the development of adequate regulatory frameworks.

- **European Union:** In 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution asserting that autonomous weapons must remain under meaningful human control and that IHL applies to all weapons systems. This influenced the EU's policy positions in international discussions on AWS. More recently, in February 2026, EU Parliament Members raised targeted questions regarding the EU's role in shaping global regulatory frameworks for AWS, reflecting sustained concern over ethical, legal, and humanitarian implications of AWS. These developments highlight the EU's role in advocating for coordinated international approaches and ethical safeguards in the governance of emerging military technologies.

- **North Atlantic Treaty Organization:** In July 2024, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) released a revised Artificial Intelligence Strategy outlining key principles for responsible use of AI in defense. These principles include lawfulness, accountability, and human oversight in the deployment of autonomous systems within military operations. This strategy commits Allied members to aligning AI use with existing international law and ethical norms, reinforcing principles emphasized in multilateral forums like the CCW. Although not legally binding, NATO's strategic guidance influences how Member States develop, adopt, and regulate AI-enabled military technologies in accordance with broader security and legal frameworks.

5. Recommendations and Solutions

- **Strengthening Weapons Review Mechanisms:** Encourage states to strengthen and standardize national weapons review processes, particularly those conducted under Article 36 of Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions. This should include expanding review criteria to explicitly address the unique challenges posed by autonomy and artificial intelligence, facilitating the sharing of best practices and technical expertise among states, and increasing transparency regarding review procedures, while respecting national security considerations.

- **Legally Binding International Framework:** Negotiate a legally binding international framework that prohibits fully autonomous weapons systems from operating without meaningful human control. This framework should also regulate other autonomous systems by establishing limits on operational scope, duration, geographic deployment, and target selection. It should additionally clearly define standards for human oversight, accountability, and compliance with IHL.

- **Definition of 'Meaningful Human Control':** Develop a clear and universally accepted definition of 'meaningful human control' to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and ensure consistent interpretation across states. This definition should incorporate requirements for predictability and reliability testing of autonomous weapons, as well as clearly defined chains of legal responsibility throughout the weapons' lifecycle, from research and development to testing, deployment, and use.

- **Transparency and Confidence-Building Measures:** Promote transparency and confidence-building measures to reduce mistrust and prevent escalation related to military artificial intelligence. Such measures may include voluntary reporting on national policies regarding autonomous weapons systems, information-sharing on safeguards, testing practices, ethical guidelines, and regular intergovernmental dialogue to address concerns about arms races and miscalculation.

- **Multi-Stakeholder and Inclusive Approaches:** Include diverse stakeholders in discussions on autonomous weapons regulation. Governments should engage international and regional organizations, civil society, humanitarian actors, academic and technical experts, the private sector, and youth representatives in line with the Youth, Peace, and Security Agenda to ensure inclusive, forward-looking, and well-informed policy development.

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How should the international community define autonomous weapons systems, and why is reaching a common definition important for regulation?
2. What role should human oversight play in decisions involving the use of lethal force, and how can “meaningful human control” be interpreted in practice?
3. To what extent are existing international humanitarian law frameworks sufficient to address the challenges posed by autonomous weapons systems?
4. How can accountability and responsibility be ensured when autonomous weapons systems cause unintended harm during armed conflict?
5. Should the international community prioritize legally binding regulations or voluntary norms when addressing autonomous weapons, and what are the advantages and challenges of each approach?
6. How can states balance national security interests with ethical and humanitarian concerns when developing military artificial intelligence?
7. How can transparency and confidence-building measures between states reduce mistrust and promote cooperation in the regulation of autonomous weapons systems?
8. What role should non-state actors, such as tech companies, civil society organizations, NGOs, and youth-led movements, play in shaping international norms and policies on lethal AI and autonomous weapons?

RESEARCH AIDS

Significance:
Having solid research and becoming confident in your knowledge before walking into the committee is the first step in the process. Research well, become well-versed in the topic and your country. Don't forget that during the conference, you will be playing the part of a knowledgeable and experienced diplomat. Do the research, act the part!

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