

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

December 8, 2016

The Honorable John F. Kerry  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, DC 20520

Ashton B. Carter  
Secretary of Defense  
U.S. Department of Defense  
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretaries Kerry and Carter,

We are writing with respect to the upcoming Fifth Review Conference of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) to be held at the United Nations in Geneva on December 12-16, 2016.

The main focus of this five-year Review Conference will be lethal autonomous weapons systems, also known as fully autonomous weapons or so-called “killer robots.” The high contracting parties, including the United States, will decide whether to continue discussions on this issue in the CCW, and if so, what the format, content, objective and duration of the talks should be.

We believe that fully autonomous weapons are a matter of vital concern. They would not simply be another weapon in the world’s arsenals, but would constitute a new method of warfare – and one that would not be for the betterment of humankind. Once activated, these weapons would be able to select and attack targets without any further human involvement. While these weapons do not yet exist, technology is racing ahead, and experts say that they could be procured within years, not decades.

We support the call for a preemptive prohibition on the development, production, and use of fully autonomous weapons. This call has been endorsed by thousands of artificial intelligence and robotics experts, including many of the most respected people in those fields, as well as two dozen Nobel peace Laureates, more than 100 prominent faith leaders, numerous humanitarian organizations and many more.

This prohibition, which should require meaningful human control over target selection and engagement for each individual attack, could be achieved as a new CCW protocol. The CCW has already taken similar action on one weapon, namely preemptively banning blinding laser weapons through its Protocol IV.

We urge that at the CCW Review Conference in December the U.S. delegation take the following actions:

- The U.S. should strongly support the continuation of discussions in the CCW on the legal, ethical, technological, proliferation, international security, and other challenges raised by what the CCW calls “lethal autonomous weapons systems.”
- The U.S. should strongly and unequivocally support the recommendation agreed to by CCW members, including the United States, in April that states establish a Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) at this Review Conference to continue these deliberations next year. The creation of an open-ended GGE would move the CCW discussions from informal to the more appropriate formal status, and indicate that the CCW is making progress on the issue and intends to produce a result. Such groups have been the CCW’s established method of work for the past two decades to address explosive remnants of war, landmines and cluster munitions. The U.S. agreed to the recommendation in April with reluctance, and at an August meeting, the U.S. indicated its preference is to continue the process using the current format of informal meetings. Given the uncertainty on advancing arms control measures, support for proceeding to the more formal process seems warranted.
- The U.S. should propose an ambitious mandate for CCW work in 2017, one that states that CCW deliberations in 2017 should be carried out with a view to formal negotiations on lethal autonomous weapons systems in the future.
- The U.S. should propose that the CCW commits to at least four weeks of time for its deliberations on lethal autonomous weapons systems in 2017. In the past, the CCW has only made progress on issues when it devoted such an amount of time.

In closing, we would like to stress that we recognize the importance of artificial intelligence and robotics to the future of the U.S. military, and their central role in the Pentagon’s Third Offset Strategy, but we firmly believe that there must always be meaningful human control over critical combat functions.

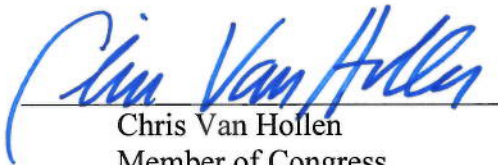
Sincerely,



James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen  
Member of Congress

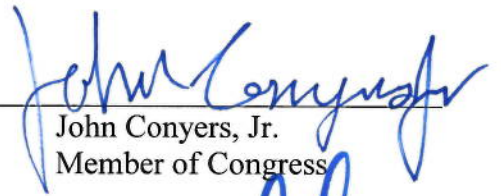


Alan Grayson  
Member of Congress



---

Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress



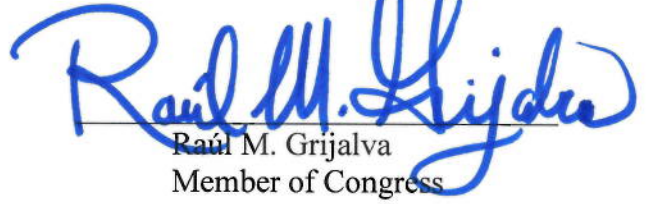
---

John Conyers, Jr.  
Member of Congress



---

John Lewis  
Member of Congress



---

Raúl M. Grijalva  
Member of Congress



---

Maxine Waters  
Member of Congress

---