Egypt submits its views on lethal autonomous weapons systems

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On 23 May 2024, Egypt submitted its views on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) to the United Nations Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly Resolution 78/241, adopted on 22 December 2023, entitled “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems”, which requested Member States to provide their perspectives on addressing the humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical challenges raised by such systems, as well as on the role of humans in the use of force.

Egypt's submission characterizes Fully Autonomous Weapons as posing a grave threat to international peace and security, raising several humanitarian, legal, and ethical concerns that must be addressed to ensure conformity with international law and international humanitarian law (IHL), particularly the cardinal principles of humanity, necessity, proportionality, and distinction.

It emphasizes that the United Nations and its disarmament machinery represent the only effective and inclusive platform to develop the necessary international rules and normative framework, especially as technological developments continue to starkly outpace the necessary regulation at the international level.

Egypt's position on Autonomous Weapons Systems is underpinned by four main elements:

First, it advocates for a **two-tiered approach** comprising the prohibition of fully autonomous weapons while regulating other military applications of AI. It supports a **legally binding prohibition of fully autonomous weapons**, as suggested by the UN Secretary-General in his proposal for a New Agenda for Peace. **This prohibition must be based on a clear definition of "fully autonomous lethal weapons" to exclusively target weapons that can operate without any meaningful human control or intervention, as well as effective verification.**

Second, while acknowledging the multiple international initiatives on developing guidelines and rules for military applications of AI, **Egypt stresses the need for streamlining these initiatives and bringing them under the UN umbrella to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness**. Such initiatives must avoid introducing arbitrary international oversight mechanisms or imposing discriminatory export controls and should not be regarded as substitutes for a legally binding prohibition on fully autonomous weapons.

Third, the submission also emphasized the **centrality of human responsibility and accountability**, asserting that **decisions involving the taking of human life must remain under meaningful human control and cannot be delegated to machines**. It further notes that **even if an algorithm can be programmed to determine what is "legal" under IHL, it can never be programmed to determine what is "ethical".** Egypt also called for ensuring **explainability, human oversight, and state responsibility** for unlawful acts arising from the use of such technologies.

Fourth, a balanced and realistic approach is advocated, through which the international community can continue to benefit from new opportunities offered by AI applications while tackling relevant challenges in a realistic and effective manner. In this regard, **Egypt stresses the importance of building the capacity of developing countries and bridging the huge gaps in this domain.**

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