Federal Ministry
Republic of Austria
European and International
Affairs

Vienna Conference on
**Autonomous
Weapons Systems**
2024

Humanity at the Crossroads:
Autonomous Weapons Systems
and the Challenge of Regulation

Vienna Conference 2024

FAQs

Why?

The increased autonomy of weapons through the introduction of artificial intelligence will fundamentally transform the future of armed conflict. Autonomous weapons systems (AWS) therefore raise profound questions from a legal, ethical, humanitarian and security perspective. Humanity finds itself at a crossroads and needs to come together to face the challenge of regulations for these weapons. An overwhelming majority of states have stressed the urgent need for the international community to address the challenges and concerns raised by AWS in the first-ever UN General Assembly First Committee resolution on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems.

International efforts to regulate AWS have been ongoing for 11 years in a Group of Governmental Experts as part of the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention. Although discussions have been substantive and productive, they have not yet progressed from multilateral discussions to a mandate to negotiate international norms and rules. However, the urgency for such a step continues to increase due to rapid technological progress and the window to create a (still) preventive legal and normative framework is closing.

The aim of the conference is, thus, to increase international awareness of the topic of AWS and their legal, moral, ethical and security policy challenges, as well as to build momentum and underscore the urgency for the creation of an international legal and normative framework.

Moreover, the above-mentioned resolution requested the UN Secretary General to seek the views of Member States and observer States on lethal autonomous weapons systems and to submit a substantive report to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session for further discussion. The conference also aims to provide substantive input that could be useful for States' submissions to this report.

What, when, where?

Two-day conference organised by the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs on 29-30 April 2024 at the Hofburg Palace in Vienna. It will start with a high-level political segment (opening speakers, as well as political discussion with invited ministers, high-ranking representatives of international organisations and tech experts). This will be followed by one and a half days of expert discussions with panel presentations and Q&A sessions, followed by an opportunity for statements from states, international organisations (IOs) and non-governmental organisations.

Outcome: A Chair's Summary document outlining the main points made during the presentations and discussions. The Conference Summary will be submitted by Austria as input for the UN Secretary General's report.

Who?

All UN member and observer states, relevant IOs, especially from the UN system, the ICRC, regional organisations, the tech community, industry and civil society organisations are invited to participate.

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Why Austria?

Austria is an active contributor to the discussions of AWS in the Group of Governmental Experts with a particular focus on the need to safeguard meaningful human control over AWS. Austria supports the so-called two-tier approach of a combination of prohibitions and regulations of AWS.

In addition,

- Austria hosted an AWS Virtual/Hybrid Conference in September 2021 "Safeguarding Human Control over Autonomous Weapons Systems".
- Austria initiated and coordinated a cross-regional statement on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems developed at the 2022 First Committee of the UN General Assembly, which was supported by 70 states.

- In October 2022, Austria together with Panama co-authored a resolution adopted by consensus in the Human Rights Council on the human rights implications of new and emerging technologies.
- At the UN General Assembly 2023, Austria initiated and submitted the first ever UN General Assembly resolution on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems. The resolution was adopted with a large majority.

All further information about the conference, including the program, as well as information on visa requirements the sponsorship programme and other logistical details are available at www.AWS2024.at