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, 29-30 April 2024

The Conference will open on 29 April 2024 at 10:00 with high-level statements from the host country and other invited high-level guests and a moderated high-level political panel. This will be followed by four multidisciplinary expert panels to examine autonomous weapons systems (AWS) and address the challenges for their regulation from several angles.

Participating states and other stakeholders will be able to engage with the panellists in Q&A sessions following the expert panel presentations. In addition, there will be an opportunity for brief general statements following Panel Four on day two of the Conference and to upload statements on the publically available conference website. Limited capacity for side-events during the lunchbreak on both days, as well as exhibitions space will be available. The Conference is expected to conclude at 17:15 on 30 April 2024.

High-level Panel
"The need for regulation – action – partnerships"

A high-level panel of invited guests will discuss the need for regulation of AWS and of partnerships to move this objective forward in a moderated discussion.

Panel One
Emerging technologies, AWS and the (future) shape of conflict

The panel will set the Conference's scene, discussing where technological development in the field of AWS is going and how the issue of AWS relates to wider questions around Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the military domain and large-scale data processing. It will address implications of 'autonomy' on international security and society in general and introduce the specific humanitarian, legal, ethical, security and technological challenges of AWS.

Panel Two
Human control and accountability under the law

The panel will consider the role of humans in the use of force regarding AWS and provide the basis to discuss the necessary positive obligations that would allow for adequate human judgement and control. It will assess to what extent human decision-making is indispensable to make moral and legal judgements ahead of the use of force and to hold people accountable as required by international law. The panel will also address design, development and training aspects related to AWS.

Panel Three
Human dignity and the ethics of algorithms

The panel will consider the range of ethical and human rights aspects that are of key relevance in relation to AWS and their regulation. This includes the question of processing people as data through sensors and algorithms to make decisions about subjecting them to physical force, the targeting of people and the wider risks including the role of bias in data sets and algorithms.

Panel Four
How dealing with AWS will shape future human-technology relations

This panel will focus on the wider questions of why action is necessary for society as a whole and the future of armed conflict. Lessons learnt from autonomy and AI in civil applications will be discussed. The risk of an 'Autonomy' arms race, lowering the threshold for military confrontation and proliferation to non-state armed groups and terrorists demonstrate the urgency to take action.