



# CAMPAIGN TO **STOP** KILLER ROBOTS

3 April 2018

Florence Parly  
Minister for the Armed Forces  
Ministry for the Armed Forces  
14, Rue Saint-Dominique  
75700 Paris SP 07  
FRANCE

Sent via email to: Mr. Martin Briens: [martin.briens@cabinet.defense.gouv.fr](mailto:martin.briens@cabinet.defense.gouv.fr)  
Mr. Xavier Chatel [Xavier.Chatel@cabinet.defense.gouv.fr](mailto:Xavier.Chatel@cabinet.defense.gouv.fr)

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots with respect to the new “Man-Machine-Teaming” advanced study programme that [you announced](#) on 16 March 2018 and particularly to your comment that this initiative will ensure that “the human element is constantly maintained in the decision loop.”

As concerns over fully autonomous weapons mount, our coalition of non-governmental organizations seeks clarification from France as to how the autonomous aircraft developed by this partnership will maintain meaningful human control over the critical combat functions of identifying, selecting, and engaging targets.

We understand that France’s defense procurement agency DGA (Direction générale de l’armement) will implement this new programme together with defense manufacturers Dassault Aviation and Thales, and that it aims to develop artificial intelligence technologies for use in combat aviation. The [statement issued by Dassault](#) lists several objectives for this programme, including to “improve innovative technologies in Man/Machine teaming within the cognitive air system, particularly decision-making autonomy and machine learning” and “enhance concepts and technologies in the field of smart / learning sensors.”

We are grateful to France for its leadership in getting lethal autonomous weapons systems on to the agenda of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) in 2013 and for chairing the first CCW meeting on this topic in May 2014. Yet we remain confused about the government’s national policy on lethal autonomous weapons systems and disappointed that France is not urgently pursuing legally-binding measures to prevent their development, production, and use.

Last week, *WIRED* magazine [published an in-depth interview](#) with the President of France, Emmanuel Macron, on the topic of artificial intelligence that asked for his views on lethal

autonomous weapons systems, specifically if machines with artificial intelligence can ever be trusted to make decisions to kill without human intervention. According to the article, Macron responded:

I'm dead against that. Because I think you always need responsibility and assertion of responsibility. And technically speaking, you can have in some situations, some automation which will be possible. But automation or machines put in a situation precisely to do that would create an absence of responsibility. Which, for me, is a critical issue. So that's absolutely impossible. That's why you always need a human check. And in certain ways, a human gateway. At a point of time, the machine can prepare everything, can reduce uncertainties, can reduce until nil the uncertainties and that's an improvement which is impossible without it, but at a point of time, the go or no-go decision should be a human decision because you need somebody to be responsible for it.

Statements such as this indicate that France is seriously concerned about retaining some form of human control over weapons systems. Therefore, we do not understand why France is refusing to support the development of legally-binding measures to establish the principle of human control and prevent the development of lethal autonomous weapons systems.

At the last CCW meeting on lethal autonomous weapons systems in November 2017, France stated that it would not deploy such weapons “unless they can comply with international humanitarian law.” Yet, French [officials state that](#) the government cannot support a new treaty on these weapons, in part because it “cannot ban something that does not exist” and indicate that these weapons might prove more accurate in targeting than systems controlled by humans.

In place of legally-binding measures to prevent lethal autonomous weapons systems, France and Germany have instead [proposed measures](#) such as the political declaration and code of conduct. Yet such proposals lack the fundamental moral and logical coherence necessary to make them credible. They appear to merely reflect a desire to be seen as doing “something” rather than a firm determination to avoid dehumanizing the use of force.

Rather than ineffective half-measures, we urge France to support the call to start negotiating new international law on lethal autonomous weapons systems. We also suggest that France swiftly adopt national policy and legislation to prevent the development of such weapons systems.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns with the delegation of France to the next month's CCW meeting on lethal autonomous weapons systems.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mary Wareham', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mary Wareham  
Coordinator, Campaign to Stop Killer Robots

Human Rights Watch  
1630 Connecticut Avenue, Suite 500  
Washington DC 20009  
Tel. +1 (646) 203-8292 (mobile)  
wareham@hrw.org

CC:

- Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs/Ministre de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères
- Ambassador Alice Guitton, Permanent Representative of France to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva
- Nicolas Roche, Director, Strategic Affairs, Security and Disarmament, Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs