The Swedish Peace and Arbitration Society has, since our inception in 1883, worked to push for peaceful means to end and prevent conflicts. As a member of the campaign to Stop Killer Robots, we are here because we represent civil society. The people who are not here. The people who rely on their governments to take their responsibility and represent their wishes. The people who will be affected most by the discussions happening in these rooms. The calls for disarmament ring strong and true. The discussions in the CCW so far have failed to deliver on the ambitions and expectations of the majority.

We implore states parties to the CCW to not delay on the issue of killer robots. It is important, now more than ever, to take active steps towards a legally binding instrument to prohibit and regulate these weapons. Meaningful Human Control must be maintained; any compromise of this is to leave the decision over life and death to an algorithm. It derogates not only our rights to privacy and human dignity but our fundamental right to life.

Killer Robots, if developed, would have disproportionate effects on women and on people of colour. The programming of these killer robots will not be without bias. The use of algorithms in civilian sectors has already shown that biases are present in every facet of society. Algorithms rely on the data sets from which they gather intelligence and if the data sets themselves are marred with racist and sexist stereotypes, so will the resulting algorithms be. The biases and stereotypes that permeate the current culture will not be erased but exacerbated by the use of killer robots.

Mr President, These weapons will not only be used in war but, as we have seen with other forms of military equipment, will eventually be used in civilian spaces as well. That is why it is disappointing that human rights, which must be protected in times of war and peace, have not been considered a deciding factor in these conversations. Ethics cannot be an issue among many to consider or a part of a list to check off. Ethical considerations must supersede all other factors when discussing weapons, especially weapons which would be as catastrophic and destructive as killer robots.

We cannot lose sight of what is most important. Let us not forget that the point of the CCW is to find roads towards disarmament and where these do not exist, to build them. These diplomatic talks have been happening for 8 years and the results we have seen are not enough. Incremental steps towards possible frameworks are not enough to stem the tide of an arms race. A small minority of highly militarised states should not be allowed to stall disarmament to a snail’s pace while technology races forward. Without regulation, an arms industry that is already growing in this field will continue to take advantage of the technological developments and push the limits of AI-based warfare past the turning point.

Earlier examples have shown that when weapons risk flouting principles of international law such as proportionality, distinction and accountability, new treaties have been negotiated and accepted in order to strengthen already existing jurisdiction. We have seen this with cluster munitions, mines and nuclear weapons.
The same immediate steps must be taken in order to stop killer robots before it is too late.