

A PLEA FOR PRESERVING OUR SHARED HUMANITY

Opened for Signature on 4 February 2021

As people of faith, we unite our voices on the occasion of the first International Day of Human Fraternity to express concern over the insidious development of weapons systems that lack meaningful human control. Our shared belief in the inalienable dignity of the human person and the inestimable worth of human life demands our vigilance toward new forms of military technology that mediate the use of lethal force, especially in armed conflict and policing. An urgent and firm rejection of the development of fully autonomous weapons is essential to preserving our shared humanity.

The wisdom of our traditions teaches a profound reverence for life and the practice of moral virtue. The human person must never be reduced to a set of numbers, degraded of the dignity which sets us apart from machines. Machine learning that processes vast amounts of digital information tends to replicate existing biases, causing a disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations. Fully autonomous weapons would lower the threshold for international armed conflict, and they could also be used for domestic terrorism, insurrection, policing and border-control.

While advances in technology have expanded the realm of human creativity, the surrender of life-and-death decisions to robots would represent a serious abdication of human responsibility for the content and consequences of one's actions. Artificial intelligence cannot match the uniquely human capacity for empathy, friendship, mercy, and solidarity. Paradoxically, the face-to-face encounter with human suffering preserves the humanity of warfare, which is increasingly dominated by a concern for efficiency.

Instead of placing our faith in technologies that unaccountably kill, maim and destroy human life, we devote ourselves to building cultures of peace, nonviolence, dialogue, and mutual cooperation, respecting the dignity of difference. We call on the UN member states and all people of goodwill to commit to preserving meaningful human control over the use of force, and enact a preemptive ban on fully autonomous weapons. As our technological evolution outpaces our ethical evolution, we must place firm limits on emerging technologies that undermine the ties that bind us as members of a single human family.