FACTSHEET INTERFAITH DECLARATION
IN SUPPORT OF A BAN ON FULLY AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

Action
In April 2013, an international coalition of non-governmental organizations launched the Campaign to Stop Killer Robots to raise awareness about the implications of fully autonomous weapons and to call for a comprehensive, pre-emptive ban on fully autonomous weapons.¹ In May 2013 UN Special Rapporteur Christof Heyns presented his report in the Human Rights Council in Geneva and called for a moratorium on fully autonomous weapons.² In order to raise support for a pre-emptive ban:

We call on religious leaders, faith groups and faith-based organizations to take a stand against the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons and to sign the interfaith declaration.

Technological Evolution
Over the past decade, the expanded use of technologies in warfare has changed the face of the battlefield forever. These developments are bringing new humanitarian and legal challenges. Although robots are not new to the battlefield, states are increasingly taking the human out of the decision-making loop resulting in efforts to develop fully autonomous weapons (so called killer robots). Whereas drones (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles), which also raise moral and ethical questions, still have a human operator, fully autonomous weapons would be able to select and engage targets without any human intervention. Even though fully autonomous weapons do not yet exist, many states – such as China, Israel, Russia, India, the United Kingdom and the United States – have expressed their interest, or are already actively involved, in the development and production of these robotic systems. Some precursors are already in use, such as the Israeli Iron Dome which is a fully automatic air defence system and the South Korean SGR-1 sentry robot stationed in the demilitarized zone. All these systems still have a human in-the-loop, they are defensive and stationed in a structured or demarcated environment. Therefore, these weapon systems are automatic but not yet fully autonomous. However, the increasing research and development work on fully autonomous weapons raises serious concerns and action is needed now to stop the development of these weapons before investments, technological momentum, and new military doctrine make it difficult to change course.

Objections
Fully autonomous weapons pose a serious threat to civilians in conflict areas. The major danger these weapons create is that it is extremely unlikely that they will be able to abide by international humanitarian law, in particular, the principle of distinction, proportionality and military necessity. Fully autonomous robots would lack human judgment, the ability to understand context, and the capability to oversee the consequences of their actions. These human qualities are necessary to make complex choices in a dynamic and densely populated battlefield, but a quality that robotic systems inherently lack. Therefore, fully autonomous weapons should be considered an inhumane and abhorrent weapon.

Furthermore, when civilian casualties in armed conflict occur, people want to see someone held accountable. However, when the killing is done by a fully autonomous weapon, an accountability gap is created as there is no clarity on who would be legally responsible: the commander, programmer, manufacturer, or robot itself?

¹ http://www.stopkillerrobots.org/
Finally, replacing human troops with robots could lower the threshold of entering into war. Technologies can shift the risks away from a nation’s own soldiers, but onto civilians in conflict areas. Fully autonomous weapons take the humanity out of war and foster a continuous state of war around the globe.

In order to halt these heinous weapons from entering the battlefield states must negotiate a multilateral treaty that bans the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons. To this end states must be compelled and encouraged by civil society to take action. Hence, we call on religious leaders, faith groups and faith-based organizations to urge governments to remain mindful of the humanitarian imperative and negotiate a comprehensive and pre-emptive ban on the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons.

The interfaith declaration and the signatories will most likely be presented to the public and media around January 2014.

If you are interested in signing the declaration or if you have any questions please contact Merel Ekelhof, ekelhof@paxforpeace.nl

You can also sign the declaration here www.paxforpeace.nl/interfaith-declaration