U.S. and UK Stalling UN Attempts to Ban Lethal Autonomous Weapons

London, October 7 (RHC)-- The U.S. and UK are undermining the measures by the UN to control the use of "killer robots" in an attempt to safeguard their investments, experts say. "A lot of money is going into development (of lethal autonomous weapons) and people will want a return on their investment," said Christof Heyns, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions in an interview published by the Guardian on Tuesday.

Heyns pointed out that if a "pre-emptive ban on the high-level autonomous weapons" is not reached soon, it will become extremely difficult to obtain one in the future.

According to Professor Noel Sharkey, the co-founder of the International Committee for Robot Arms Control, the current issue is the wording of such an agreement. "The UK and U.S. are both insisting that the wording for any mandate about autonomous weapons should discuss only emerging technologies. Ostensibly this is because there is concern that we will want to ban some of their current defensive weapons like the Phalanx or the Iron Dome," he said.

He noted that if the discussions go on at their current protracted pace, "many of the weapons that we are concerned about will already have been developed and potentially used." Currently no country utilizes fully autonomous weaponry, but some are developing various semi-autonomous systems.

Israel is deploying automated machine-gun turrets in certain positions on the border with the besieged Gaza Strip, which are capable of firing upon Palestinians who near them.

Britain's unmanned Taranis fighter jets are capable of autonomous flight and target identification. South Korea uses some kind of sentry robot, armed with machine guns, to patrol its border with the North.

Campaigners from across the globe have made multiple calls for a pre-emptive ban on offensive autonomous weapons over the last few years. In an open letter in July, renowned physicist Stephen Hawking, philosopher Noam Chomsky, leading technologist Elon Musk and thousands of other high-profile experts called for the banning of "killer robots" with Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The mass development of autonomous weapon systems would launch an arms race, such as the one that was triggered over the atomic bomb, with the difference that AI does not require specific hard-to-create basic materials, they argued in the letter.

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