Peace and Security: Question marks over Africa's future │ Guy Blaise Feugap

Background analysis

Africa is incredible. At least the Africans are. Currently in Africa, poverty, governance and authoritarian governments are root causes of many crises, many of which tend to mutate into violent extremism. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) has been conducting a gender conflict analysis in Cameroon since July 2019. What is heard from the survivors of conflict is awful. In other African countries conflicts lead to similar dynamics and even more tragic. And when it comes to the testimonies of women and girls who natural pillars of African societies, question marks arise when we think about Africa, in five or ten years' time. And so far, we are only talking about the impact of small arms and light weapons, which very little are produced in Africa.

The recent history of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first clearly shows that the culture of war that festers the human spirit generates important economic, political, strategic or military profit, to the detriment of human life. The human being is becoming a currency in arms producers and users' business. In the battle at the top, the great powers engage in a two-way competition: let's see who produces the deadliest weapons and who gives them more reason to have been produced. The logical consequence is the development of various types of armaments and the sowing of conflicts. Among the weapons developed for better and easier killing, there are some meant to become fully autonomous: the killer robots.

Besides this unreasonable technological development, there is a strong fear for the humanity's future, especially in communities lagging behind in terms of socio-economic development, including Africa, which will continue to be imposed conflicts (from inside and from outside) and arms sell to supposedly defend themselves. The greatest urgency against the development of killer robots becomes a preventive action. This is why root causes of these conflicts must be addressed, advocacy must be stepped up for a consistent normative framework, including a Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons on Autonomous Lethal Weapon Systems or an international binding treaty to end the killer robots.

Preventive action must be taken to ensure that technological developments do not pose an additional threat to African peoples suffering already from armed violence, the gender impacts of which are significant. Based on the experience of working in the field for some years now, it appears that international laws provide a certain protection to vulnerable populations, protected in times of conflict by International Humanitarian Law. During 2018 and 2019, meetings and

workshops were held in some African countries, during which organizations and personalities met, including at the Central African States Community and the African Union, who believe that the issue of lethal autonomous weapons should be taken seriously. But the opportunity was given to perceive new insights into the issue of Killer Robots. For some officials, the issue of Killer Robots is not specifically on the agenda, for example in the same way as small arms and light weapons. As a result, many have refused to allow their institutions to take any steps to encourage adherence to the advocacy project for a treaty against Killer Robots, an action that for them should be devolved to Peacekeeping Missions. Others have expressed doubts that such a potentially destructive technology could be used, as the Killer Robots' modus operandi as described seems unrealistic. For them it would be important to make more efforts on more urgent problems (implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325, SDGs, improvement of Human Rights, etc.).

However, there is real hope when artificial intelligence experts are part of the project. They have shown that the awareness of manufacturers of killer robots by manufacturers of other types of robots can easily dissuade them, or at least provide for strict human control, because the notion of autonomy in lethal weaponry can quickly escape the robot manufacturer, because depending on the programmed biases, the robot has the capacity to learn by itself and to acquire habits that, applied to the military field, are necessarily disastrous. This is why it is now important for IA experts to accompany organizations at the African regional level to increase the decision-makers' understanding of the political stakes and moral implications of the use of lethal autonomous weapon systems in warfare.

Why are African countries so reluctant to join the call for a binding treaty against killer robots? Since the beginning of discussions on autonomous weapons, a total of 90 out of 125 High Contracting Parties to the CCW have publicly elaborated their views in a multilateral forum. From 2013, 15 African countries out of the 25 who are High Contracting Parties to the CCW have spoken out. Among the 28 states that have expressed their desire to move to negotiate new international law to prohibit fully autonomous weapons, there are 7 African countries. Among the dozen states that have indicated they do not support negotiating new international law on fully autonomous weapons, none are from Africa.

Despite the discordant perspectives, it remains clear that killer robots are already a reality and pose a serious threat to human rights. But why are African countries which are already victims of less dangerous weapons so reluctant to join the call for a binding treaty against killer robots? One may perhaps question the need for economic and even political independence of certain States, but it is in the interest of States to decide on the matter individually. The survival of populations depends on it.