TOGETHER FIRST
A Global System that works for all

Yes	Sofengeta	No
The threat from new and emerging technology	**Conflict or political violence**	**Short**
Global catastrophic risks mitigated	**Risk multipliers managed**	**Implementation timeframe**

The proposal adopts practical strategies for Africa to champion the ban of killer robots by the year 2021.

Killer robots are robotic weapons that, once activated, can harm or kill humans without any further human control. They pose an imminent risk.

The strategy is to first get a strong position by the African Union bodies, namely, the Pan African Parliament [PAP] and the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights [ACHR].

a) Course of action 1 – Representations to PAP

Prior discussions with PAP officials revealed willingness to cooperate on the issue of killer robots and it fits in the 2020 agenda of the African union, namely, 'Silencing the Guns'.

b) Course of action 2: – Reach out to PAP parliamentarians

Engaging PAP should also include liaising with the six South African PAP.

c) Course of Action 3: – Engage the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights [ACHR]

It is important to engage the ACHR especially on the human rights implications of killer robots. Prior engagements with officials of ACHR have shown willingness to cooperate on issues of human rights and technology, including the issue of killer robots.

d) Course of action 4: – Finding a lead-state

Once there is a strong regional position on killer robots, South Africa has a potential to be a lead-state on killer robots. South Africa is preferred because it is currently active in the killer robots discussions in the UN and cooperates with civil society in Africa.

2. Obstricals & solutions

First, since African States are not developing killer robots and many have no capacity to do so, there may be questions as to the relevance and urgency of the killer robots issue to Africa.

To overcome this, when engaging African States, it is important to emphasise that in the UN debate on killer robots, the voice of African States is critical, in particular, on issues relating to human dignity and the implications of killer robots on racial and gender discrimination. Furthermore, killer robots may be used against African States and their

Killer robots raise far-reaching legal, ethical and security concerns. They cannot comply with laws applicable to armed conflict and will undermine protections afforded to civilians. They will commit war crimes and yet it will be difficult if not impossible to hold someone accountable. Indeed, it is unethical for machines to make decisions about who lives or dies. Killer robots will make it too easy for States to use force, thereby undermining international peace and security. Further, killer robots present capabilities that may undermine the privacy of the African persons and potentially render them vulnerable resulting in overwhelming threats to global security. There is an URGENT need for a legally binding instrument outlawing killer robots.

As indicated above, the African regional organs such as the Pan African Parliament [PAP] and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights [ACHPR] statements on killer robots have shown that there exists political willingness to engage on the issue of killer robots.

For example, engagement with the African Group on Disarmament in Geneva in 2017 and 2018 showed political willingness on the part of African States which was coupled with improved participation in the UN Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapon Systems (UNGGE).

The African Group of States has submitted two statements to the UNGGE calling for the ban of killer robots. In emphasising that killer robots should be banned before they come into existence, the African Group of States noted as follows: “Notions of human dignity and humanity are the parents of all other humans' rights and should govern human conduct including human inventions. The African Group finds it inhumane, abhorrent, repugnant, and against public conscience for humans to give up control to machines, allowing machines to decide who lives or dies, how many lives and whose life is acceptable as collateral damage when force is used. The African Group strongly asserts that technology should be solely dedicated for the prosperity and progress of human beings in all spheres of life.”

Furthermore, in its General Comment Number 3 on the Right to Life, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights stated that “in any machine autonomy in the selection of human targets or the use of force should be subject to meaningful human control”.

Moreover, of the 30 states that have so far explicitly called for a ban on killer robots, 8 are African states. Against this backdrop, the proposal to develop a strong regional position is feasible and within reach.

MITIGATING RISKS

Second, the issue of killer robots is highly technical and specialised; some African States may not have the technical capacity to participate in the killer robots debate. There may be limited accessible experts on killer robots from the African continent.

This can be overcome by offering technical support to relevant AU organs like the PAP, ACHPR and the African Group on Disarmament.

Yet, with the current threats to multilateralism which have seen powerful states walking back on their commitments on disarmament issues, it is a tough battle to produce a ban on killer robots in time, especially within consensus-based institutions like the UNCCW. This is made worse by the AI arms race between global powers such as the United States and China which may lead them to deploy killer robots "without adequate safeguards against brittleness, unpredictability, and systemic risks that will arise when algorithms interact at machine speed."

Hope in the mitigation of this global catastrophic risk may rest with majoritarian-based institutions like the UN General Assembly or other processes outside the UNCCW. For this to succeed, there is need for like-minded States and regional blocks to come together and ban killer robots.

Getting the African regional block to take a strong position on killer robots and finding a lead-state from the African continent will be a huge step towards provision of alternative process outside the UNCCW. As already indicated, it is easier for African States to take positions if they are backed by the regional bodies.