



# Cabinet

## Minute of Decision

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### **Report of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee: Period Ended 19 November 2021**

On 22 November 2021, Cabinet made the following decisions on the work of the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee for the period ended 19 November 2021:

ERS-21-MIN-0046    **Autonomous Weapons Systems: New Zealand Policy**    CONFIRMED  
**Position and Approach for International Engagement**  
Portfolio: Disarmament and Arms Control

Martin Bell  
for Secretary of the Cabinet



# Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee

## Minute of Decision

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### Autonomous Weapons Systems: New Zealand Policy Position and Approach for International Engagement

**Portfolio**                      **Disarmament and Arms Control**

On 16 November 2021, the Cabinet External Relations and Security Committee:

- 1        **noted** that autonomous weapons systems are generally understood to be weapons systems that, once activated, can select and engage targets without further human intervention;
- 2        **noted** that autonomous weapons systems exist along a spectrum of autonomy, from existing acceptable systems to future “fully” autonomous systems intended to operate completely outside of human control, and that the risks posed by such systems generally increase alongside their level of autonomy;
- 3        **noted** that some autonomous weapons systems offer potential military benefits and are being actively pursued by a range of global militaries, including New Zealand’s close military partners;
- 4        **noted** that the prospect of future unregulated autonomous weapons systems presents serious legal, ethical and security risks that engage Aotearoa New Zealand’s interests and values;
- 5        **agreed** to Aotearoa New Zealand’s proposed policy position, namely that:
  - 5.1      there is an urgent need to agree new and adequate rules and limits on the development and use of autonomous weapons systems, including to enable the realisation of their potential military benefits;
  - 5.2      Aotearoa New Zealand will advocate for a legally-binding instrument to articulate these rules or limits, and will also support interim steps and measures such as non-legally binding guidelines, declarations or norms, without prejudice to the future adoption of legally binding measures;
  - 5.3      Aotearoa New Zealand will engage actively in efforts to identify appropriately nuanced prohibitions, controls and restrictions, recognising that a range of controls may be required for autonomous weapons systems that occupy different points along the spectrum of autonomy;
  - 5.4      Aotearoa New Zealand will actively engage in international fora to pursue an express prohibition on autonomous weapons systems that are not sufficiently predictable or controllable to meet legal or ethical requirements, as well as controls on other autonomous weapons systems to ensure sufficient human oversight;

- 5.5 Aotearoa New Zealand will actively engage to pursue controls or positive obligations on other autonomous weapons systems to ensure sufficient human control or oversight throughout the lifecycle of the weapon system;
- 5.6 Aotearoa New Zealand will support international efforts to strengthen the existing weapons review process, recognising the contribution that this work can make to the effective control of autonomous weapons systems;
- 5.7 Aotearoa New Zealand will play an active and constructive role in seeking a forward-leaning mandate for a refreshed Group of Governmental Experts at its Review Conference in December 2021;
- 5.8 Aotearoa New Zealand will also remain open to other opportunities to make progress;
- 5.9 Aotearoa New Zealand will seek to play a leadership role in building a diverse, inclusive, and effective coalition of States, substantive experts, and civil society groups to promote and contribute to the timely elaboration of the necessary rules and limits on autonomous weapons systems in a multilateral setting, both within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and any other credible fora that emerge;
- 6 **noted** that an informal inter-agency working group has been established to leverage expertise and elaborate the details of Aotearoa New Zealand's position.

Janine Harvey  
Committee Secretary

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**Present:**

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern (Chair)  
Hon Grant Robertson  
Hon Kelvin Davis  
Hon Andrew Little  
Hon David Parker  
Hon Poto Williams  
Hon Kris Faafoi  
Hon Phil Twyford

**Officials present from:**

Office of the Prime Minister  
Officials Committee for ERS