

The European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) Call to Action

The European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) is a civil society network of organisations working to promote human rights, respect for the rule of law, disarmament and conflict prevention. EFAD has been formed to challenge the growing global use of armed drones and to address key concerns regarding their deployment and proliferation, through engaging with governments, European institutions and civil society, and by promoting political and public debate.

The use of armed drones presents a number of legal, ethical and global peace and security challenges that make their increasing deployment a pressing cause for concern. With their long endurance, armed capabilities, low costs and the lack of physical risk to their operators during use, armed drones have distinct characteristics in comparison to other platforms. These functions lower the threshold for lethal force and have enabled their use in counter-terrorism operations that are challenging international legal frameworks. Armed drones have significantly expanded the practice of extrajudicial/targeted killing by certain states over the past decade. Their use has resulted in a significant number of civilian casualties, despite claims of 'precision'. Drone strikes have fostered resentment and can engender support for armed groups. The continuous threat of armed drones has been demonstrated to lead to severe psychological impacts on communities. Governments using armed drones have also refused to provide transparency regarding drone strikes. This secrecy undermines accountability, which deprives the victims of drone strikes of their right to an effective remedy.

We believe the growing proliferation and use of armed drones, including among European states, is a real danger to global peace, security and international law. We urge that the legal and ethical issues raised by their use, as well as the security consequences, be fully, publicly and democratically debated.

Therefore, we call upon all European governments, individually and through European institutions, to:

1. Articulate Clear Policies

- All states must recognise the grave challenges presented by armed drones, and publicly articulate clear policy and legal positions on this issue. This includes possible collaboration in drone operations by other parties.
- States that use armed drones must publish their rules and procedures to show full compliance with international law, including preventing, mitigating and investigating all unlawful deaths, and more broadly all civilian harm.

2. Prevent Complicity

- States must not be complicit in unlawful drone strikes, for example, by providing logistical support or data used to track down targets. European states must accept their 'third-party responsibility'.

3. Ensure Transparency

- All states should work on transparency through the sharing and publication of information that can contribute to the development of restrictive norms of behaviour, the prevention of harm and the strengthening of international law.
- Additionally, states that use armed drones in counterterrorism operations must provide timely public information, on a case-by-case basis, on the legal and factual grounds on which specific individuals or groups are targeted, and provide information on the number of casualties and their identities.

4. Establish Accountability

- States involved in drone strikes must conduct prompt, thorough, independent and impartial investigations into all allegations of unlawful death or civilian harm and publish the results of each investigation in a timely manner.
- All states must ensure that the rights of victims of drone strikes are upheld, including by ensuring effective access to judicial remedies and reparation.

5. Control Proliferation

- All states must enact stricter controls on the transfer of military and dual-use drone technology. This includes standardizing categories of drones and related technology in export control regimes and treaties on national, regional and international levels, and applying clear criteria to prevent irresponsible transfers.
- All states should participate in a global debate in relevant international forums, so as to work towards broader understanding of, and support by states for, stricter control of transfers of drones and drone-related technology.

The above Call to Action was unanimously adopted at a meeting of the European Forum on Armed Drones (EFAD) held in Brussels on 7 April 2016. It has since been ratified by the following civil society organisations:



Airwars



Amnesty International



Article 36



Center for Civilians in Conflict



Committee of 100 in Finland



Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions



Drone Wars UK



European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights



Groupe de recherche et d'information sur la paix et la sécurité



International Commission of Jurists



International Criminal Law and Human Rights Initiative



Italian Coalition for Civil Rights and Freedom



Italian Disarmament Network



Norwegian Peace Association



Observatoire des armements



Omega Research Foundation



Open Society Foundations



PAX



Pax Christi Flanders



Pax Christi International



Quaker Council for European Affairs



Reprieve



Rights Watch UK



Saferworld