

HMDC Presents... DISEC: Part 3 (International Efforts)

HMDC Presents... Disarmament and International Security Committee (DISEC): Drone Surveillance and Privacy (Research Report, December 2026)

Prepared for HMDC Forensics delegates attending Harvard Model United Nations Online, December 5-6, 2026. Every fact below comes from a page or official document that was opened and read in October 2026. Each evidence entry repeats its publication and date so the source is always visible.

WHAT OUR CHAIRS WILL FOCUS ON

Harvard explains that this committee looks at drones in two ways: drones that help people in disasters, and drones that are used in war and raise security worries. Harvard splits the topic between two sessions, and our December session is the one about privacy, surveillance and intelligence, which means how drones watch people and gather information. The October session, not ours, covers armed drones and who is held responsible when they are used. In December, we will be asked to build international frameworks, or shared rules between countries, that support the "responsible use of drones" while keeping the world secure.

Harvard Model United Nations, HMUN Online Committee Page, Last Accessed: October 2026

<https://www.harvardmun.org/disec-online>

The parts of this HMDC report that match this focus most closely are the Introduction, Section 1A (the surveillance entries), Sections 1B to 1F, Sections 2B, 2C, 2E and 2F, and Sections 3A to 3C.

How we use this report: This report spends a lot of space on autonomous weapons, sometimes called killer robots, and on drone strikes in Ukraine, Russia and Sudan (Sections 1G, 2D, 2G and 3E, and the war entries in Section 1A). Those topics are about weapons that attack, which is closer to the October session than to ours, so we treat them as background only. We use them to show that the camera on a drone can lead to a strike, but we do not make a killer-robot treaty our main solution. Our speeches, position papers and resolutions should put privacy limits, registration, rules on face scanning, export controls on surveillance tools and transparency first.

PART 3, INTERNATIONAL EFFORTS

Beyond the UN, several international organizations and treaties touch drone surveillance: regional data protection treaties, arms export control regimes, civil aviation standards, counterterrorism forums and humanitarian organizations. None of them covers the whole problem, which is why delegates may propose filling the gaps.

3A. DATA PROTECTION AND AI TREATIES

Council of Europe, Last Accessed: October 2026: Convention 108 protects personal data

Tagline: Protecting personal data by treaty

Source: According to... Council of Europe, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/data-protection/convention108-and-protocol>

Fact: It states... Convention 108, opened for signature on January 28, 1981, requires parties to apply its principles in national law to protect people when their personal data is processed. Its Additional Protocol requires independent supervisory authorities and covers data flows across borders. Convention 108+ is the modernised version. Only states may be parties, and membership is not limited to European states.

This means... A binding international data protection treaty already exists and can be joined by countries outside Europe. Delegates could encourage more states to join it as a way to regulate drone data.

Council of Europe, Last Accessed: October 2026: The first international AI treaty excludes defence

Tagline: Signing the first AI treaty

Source: According to... Council of Europe, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/artificial-intelligence/the-framework-convention-on-artificial-intelligence>

Fact: It states... The Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence opened for signature on September 5, 2024. Signatories include the European Union, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Japan, Israel and Ukraine. It requires AI to respect human rights, democracy and the rule of law, but parties need not apply it to national security activities, and it does not apply to national defence.

This means... Like the EU AI Act, this treaty leaves military uses aside. That gap is exactly where DISEC could act on drone surveillance.

3B. ARMS AND EXPORT CONTROL REGIMES

Missile Technology Control Regime, Last Accessed: October 2026: 35 partners control unmanned delivery systems

Tagline: Controlling unmanned delivery systems

Source: According to... Missile Technology Control Regime, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://mtcr.info/>

Fact: It states... The Missile Technology Control Regime is a group of 35 countries that coordinate national export licensing to prevent the spread of unmanned delivery systems capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction. Brazil has chaired it since November 2023.

This means... The largest drones fall under an existing non-proliferation regime, but small surveillance drones generally do not. Delegates should note that this regime is about weapons delivery, not privacy.

Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat, Last Accessed: October 2026: 117 states are parties to the Arms Trade Treaty

Tagline: Counting Arms Trade Treaty parties

Source: According to... Arms Trade Treaty Secretariat, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://thearmstradetreaty.org/treaty-status.html>

Fact: It states... The Arms Trade Treaty, which regulates the international trade in conventional arms, entered into force on December 24, 2014. The Secretariat's summary lists 117 states parties and 25 signatories that have not yet ratified.

This means... A global arms trade treaty exists and was adopted by the General Assembly (A/RES/67/234 B). Delegates can debate whether its export assessment process should explicitly cover armed and surveillance drones.

3C. CIVIL AVIATION AND COUNTERTERRORISM COOPERATION

ICAO, Last Accessed: October 2026: Global rules for unmanned aviation

Tagline: Setting global drone aviation rules

Source: According to... ICAO, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link: <https://www.icao.int/safety/UA/Pages/default.aspx>

Fact: It states... The International Civil Aviation Organization, a UN specialised agency in Montréal, develops global rules, practices and guidance to integrate drones safely, securely and efficiently. Its Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems Panel writes standards for flying drones in shared airspace, and an Advanced Air Mobility Study Group advises on future air mobility. ICAO held its first Advanced Air Mobility Symposium in September 2024.

This means... ICAO focuses on safety and security in the air, not privacy. Delegates could ask ICAO to include privacy in its guidance, or keep aviation and privacy rules separate.

Global Counterterrorism Forum, Last Accessed: October 2026: Non-binding practices against terrorist drones

Tagline: Guiding states against terrorist drones

Source: According to... Global Counterterrorism Forum, Last Accessed: October 2026

Link:

<https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/2019/Berlin%20Memorandum%20EN.pdf>

Fact: It states... The Berlin Memorandum offers non-binding practices to guide governments in countering terrorist use of drones. It links drones to Security Council resolution 1540 (2004), which requires states to stop non-State actors acquiring weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, to the extent that drones are such a means of delivery.

This means... International counterterrorism cooperation on drones exists but is voluntary. Delegates can propose that it include privacy safeguards when states deploy counter-drone detection systems.

3D. HUMANITARIAN AND RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS

ICRC, May 12, 2021: Pressing states through humanitarian law

Tagline: Pressing states through humanitarian law

Source: According to... ICRC, May 12, 2021

Link: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/icrc-position-autonomous-weapon-systems>

Fact: It states... The International Committee of the Red Cross, the guardian of the Geneva Conventions, supports international efforts on autonomous weapons, including under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, and stresses that agreed limits are needed quickly because the technology is developing fast.

This means... The ICRC is a neutral organization that many states respect. Delegates can cite its positions as a middle ground between a full ban and no rules.

UNIDIR, December 1, 2017: Building on earlier UN study

Tagline: Building on earlier UN study

Source: According to... UNIDIR, December 1, 2017

Link: <https://unidir.org/publication/increasing-transparency-oversight-and-accountability-armed-unmanned-aerial-vehicles>

Fact: It states... UNIDIR's 2017 study built on a 2015 UN publication on armed drones and proposed ways for states to strengthen shared understandings of transparency, oversight and accountability. It was written by researchers at UNIDIR in Geneva.

This means... UNIDIR is a ready research partner. A resolution could ask UNIDIR to study drone surveillance and privacy and report back to DISEC.

3E. ALLIANCE DEFENCE AND MILITARY AI DIPLOMACY

North Atlantic Treaty Organization, September 12, 2025: NATO launches Eastern Sentry after drone incursion

Tagline: Guarding NATO airspace from drones

Source: According to... North Atlantic Treaty Organization, September 12, 2025

Link: <https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/articles/news/2025/09/12/nato-launches-eastern-sentry-to-bolster-posture-along-eastern-flank>

Fact: It states... Russian drones entered Polish airspace on September 10, 2025, which NATO called the largest concentration of airspace violations against the alliance so far. Poland asked for Article 4 consultations. NATO then launched "Eastern Sentry," a military activity that combines traditional forces with new technology, including tools against drones. Secretary General Mark Rutte said, "Russia's recklessness in the air along our eastern flank is increasing in frequency."

This means... Drones now test the borders of a major military alliance. Counter-drone systems that detect and track every object in the sky can also watch civilians, so delegates can ask that these systems include privacy safeguards.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, February 26, 2026: Fewer states sign the newest military AI pledge

Tagline: Losing support for military AI pledges

Source: According to... S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, February 26, 2026

Link: <https://rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/ip26029-the-uncertain-future-of-the-reaim-summit/>

Fact: It states... The third summit on Responsible AI in the Military Domain (REAIM) met in A Coruña, Spain, on February 4-5, 2026. Of 85 states that attended, only 40 endorsed its outcome, "Pathways to Action." More than 50 countries endorsed the 2023 document and more than 60 endorsed the 2024 one. Neither the United States nor China endorsed the 2026 text, the first time a REAIM outcome lacked both superpowers.

This means... Voluntary pledges outside the UN are losing support. Delegates can argue that the UN, where almost every state takes part, is now the more important forum for rules on AI drones.

Africa Renewal (United Nations), May 17, 2024: West African states call for a treaty

Tagline: Building a regional voice for a ban

Source: According to... Africa Renewal (United Nations), May 17, 2024

Link: <https://africarenewal.un.org/en/magazine/unregulated-autonomous-weapons-systems-pose-risk-africa>

Fact: It states... The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) held a conference on autonomous weapons in Freetown, Sierra Leone, on April 17-18, 2024. Its Freetown Communiqué supported negotiations on a binding treaty to ban autonomous weapons that operate without meaningful human control. Costa Rica, the Philippines, and Trinidad and Tobago also hosted regional conferences, and the article reported that more than 115 states supported starting treaty talks. Sierra Leone's ambassador said, "Machines and algorithms should not make life and death decisions."

This means... Regional meetings in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Caribbean are building support for a treaty from the bottom up. Delegates from these regions can present a united position, and their numbers matter in the General Assembly, where every state has one vote.

Lieber Institute, United States Military Academy at West Point, March 27, 2026: China's narrow definition of an unacceptable weapon

Tagline: Supporting human control while keeping room for autonomy

Source: According to... Lieber Institute, United States Military Academy at West Point, March 27, 2026

Link: <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/human-oversight-chinese-characteristics-lethal-autonomous-weapons-ccw-gge/>

Fact: It states... China supports a two-tier approach: ban "unacceptable" fully autonomous systems and regulate the rest with "appropriate" human involvement. But China's 2022 working paper bans a system only if it has all five traits together: it is lethal, fully autonomous, impossible to switch off, indiscriminate, and able to evolve without control. The institute argues this line is very narrow and leaves out many autonomous systems China is developing. It also notes that China, like other major powers, shares little about its national weapons reviews, so checking whether they obey the rules is very hard.

This means... Two countries can both say "humans must stay in control" and still mean very different things. Delegates should write exact definitions and ask for transparency about weapons reviews, or a treaty could look strong on paper and change little in practice.

French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, September 10, 2026: 128 states adopt the Geneva report on autonomous weapons

Tagline: Laying foundations for a future framework

Source: According to... French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, September 10, 2026

Link: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/presse-et-ressources/decouvrir-et-informer/actualites/organisations-internationales-reunion-du-groupe-d-experts-gouvernementaux-sur-les-systemes-d-armes>

Fact: It states... After three years of talks, the 128 states party to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons agreed on the final report of the Group of Governmental Experts on lethal autonomous weapons. France said the report helps define the systems concerned, sets out common principles, provides clear prohibitions for certain systems, and covers control, risk reduction and responsibility. It confirms that human beings "exercise control" over weapons with autonomous functions. France wants the November 2026 Review Conference to adopt a new negotiating mandate, so that states can begin work on an instrument that bans fully autonomous weapons and regulates the rest.

This means... The Geneva track has finally produced an agreed text, and the next decision comes at the Review Conference just before this committee meets. Delegates can welcome the report and urge a negotiating mandate, or, if the Review Conference fails, propose that the General Assembly take up the work instead.

3F. PROPOSED EFFORTS

- **A legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons by 2026**, proposed by the UN Secretary-General and the ICRC, with the November 2026 CCW Review Conference as the main opportunity (see 1G and 2G).
- **A moratorium on the sale of surveillance tools until human rights safeguards exist**, proposed by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights for hacking tools, which delegates could extend to drone surveillance systems (see 1B).
- **Stricter, criteria-based export controls on military and dual-use drones**, proposed by the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions (see 1E).
- **Wider membership of Convention 108+**, which is open to states outside Europe (see 3A).
- **A new negotiating mandate at the November 2026 CCW Review Conference**, proposed by France and built on the elements agreed in Geneva in September 2026 (see 3E and 2G).
- **A treaty that bans autonomous weapons working without meaningful human control**, proposed by West African states in the 2024 Freetown Communiqué (see 3E).

KEY VOCABULARY

1. **Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) / unmanned aircraft system (UAS):** an aircraft with no pilot on board, plus its controls and links; the formal names for a drone.
2. **Remotely piloted aircraft:** a drone flown by a person on the ground, sometimes from thousands of kilometres away.
3. **Surveillance:** watching, listening to or collecting data about people, often without their knowledge.
4. **Biometric identification:** recognising a person by body features such as face, walk or voice.
5. **Facial recognition:** software that compares a face in an image with a database to identify the person.
6. **Metadata:** data about communications (who, when, where) rather than the content itself.
7. **Necessity and proportionality:** the legal test that an intrusion must be needed for a lawful goal and no greater than required.
8. **Geofencing / no-fly zone:** a virtual boundary that a drone is blocked from entering.
9. **Dual-use:** technology with both civilian and military uses, such as a camera drone.
10. **Export control:** government rules that require a licence before certain goods can be sold abroad.
11. **Targeted killing:** a deliberate, planned use of lethal force against a specific person, often by drone.
12. **Lethal autonomous weapons system (LAWS):** a weapon that can select and attack targets without a human decision.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should international rules treat surveillance drones and armed drones as one issue or as two separate issues, given that drone cameras now choose targets in war?
2. When, if ever, is it acceptable for a government to use drones with facial recognition over a peaceful protest?
3. Should the UN recommend a global registration and identification system for drones, and who would pay for it in developing countries?
4. Should export controls on drones and AI cameras be voluntary, as in the Wassenaar Arrangement, or binding, as in the Arms Trade Treaty?
5. How can the UN hold states accountable for drone surveillance and strikes when the Security Council rarely examines them?
6. Should the 2026 deadline for a treaty on autonomous weapons be kept, extended or abandoned, and should such a treaty also cover AI surveillance?
7. How can states stop terrorist drones without expanding surveillance of their own citizens?
8. Should the UN set privacy standards for its own peacekeeping drones?

