



MIDDLEGROUND ISSUE 1/2024

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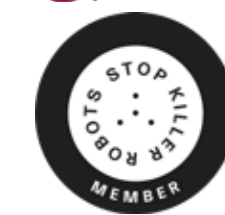
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PROGRESS & CHALLENGES

Over the past six months, SafeGround has been busy working to reduce the impacts of legacy and emerging weapons.



HISTORIC MOMENT IN NOVEMBER 2023

Our efforts on the Stop Killer Robots campaign have seen significant progress, particularly in the Pacific region. In November 2023, a historic moment unfolded at the United Nations General Assembly First Committee. It was historic for the international community but also for Pacific engagement on the issue of autonomous weapons. The first ever resolution on autonomous weapons passed with an overwhelming majority. Amongst the 164 states in favour were eight small Pacific Island nations, marking the first time many of them have engaged with this issue. Since the genesis of SafeGround’s regional campaign, Pacific engagement has increased exponentially. Today the majority of Pacific Island states represented at the UN are taking a stand against autonomous weapons. Our dedication remains unwavering as we look ahead to the UN Secretary General’s forthcoming report on autonomous weapons, which invites states and stakeholders to contribute their perspectives on humanitarian, legal, security, technological, and ethical dimensions.

Australia, unfortunately, continues to develop and invest in such weapons. We pursue various avenues to engage

our government on critical issues related to autonomous weapons systems. Despite persistent resistance to supporting a legally binding instrument, Australia’s recent alignment with the UNGA resolution signals a potential shift. As we look to the future, we remain hopeful for Australian support when we approach the United Nations General Assembly later this year. We hope Australia will join the global call for an international treaty, safeguarding our global community. In our view, killer robots are a step too far. We have witnessed the impact of digital dehumanisation in social settings, and seek to avoid a dangerous precedent in warfare. Let’s hope that in the near future, Australia will share our vision.

BROADENING MINE ACTION - HONIARA

Our commitment to support victims of war in the Solomon Islands is steadily building in Honiara. Our project is ‘*Broadening Mine Action in the Solomon Islands*’. With the help of Maeveryn Kabolo Pitano, a survivor of an unexploded ordnance accident, we are laying foundations to deliver risk education and victim assistance projects in response to explosive remnants of war contamination which continues to impact lives and livelihoods in the Pacific. Maeveryn’s resilience and insight is invaluable to SafeGround’s goals implementing a robust and

comprehensive approach, addressing the challenges associated with explosive remnants of war contamination, a crucial yet overlooked aspect by governments, including Australia.

LETHAL AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS INTERACTIVE DOCUMENTARY

“The manufacture and deployment of lethal autonomous weapons (LAWS) is unregulated and is a system that isn’t limited to the battlefield nor to professional armies – it is out of control both in terms of who makes and deploys them, and who is targeted. In a new conflict landscape where AI is in command, where does accountability rest when AI has decision-making control and innocent lives are lost?”

The interactive documentary, *Lethal Autonomous Weapons on Trial*, has received development funding from Screen Queensland. The project investigates who is to blame in a scenario in which two young Pasifika siblings are misidentified and killed by autonomous weapons. Informed by real-life expert witnesses from AI research and development, militaries, governments, law and ethics, the audience must act as a jury to determine culpability, and in doing so, decide on how the question of lethal autonomous weapons regulation should be answered. SafeGround provided seed funding to help the project get to this important stage of development. For more information, and to learn how you can support this project, please visit <https://www.lawsontrialfilm.com>.

KOKATHA PEOPLE

In 2022, SafeGround was asked to consult on some munitions found on the Woomera Missile Testing Range by the lawyers representing the traditional owners of the area, the Kokatha People. We provided the comments and identification that we could and besides general munitions such as mortars, a Swedish manufactured SAAB missile was identified.

This missile wasn’t just present, which was a breach of defences ‘clean ranges policy’, but had landed directly on top of a sacred site. A field trip was conducted with the senior Kokatha elder, the Woomera Range Base Commander and John Rodsted of SafeGround. Of all things discussed the concept of creating a catalogue of important sites, objects etc was discussed. Both the senior Elder and the Base Commander vigorously embraced the idea. From the Base Commander’s perspective he was horrified that their actions could damage sacred sites or objects. He put it that if they know where they are they will avoid them. This sentiment was echoed by the senior elder.

A year passed but much discussion was undertaken between the Kokatha and SafeGround. John Rodsted offered to conduct a field mission in Woomera to begin such a catalogue. This trip eventuated in October 2023 and we spent three weeks in the desert systematically documenting everything found. The team was Andrew Starkey - a Kokatha elder, John Rodsted, Mette Eliseussen and Miriam Deprez (SafeGround’s senior field Researcher,

National Coordinator and Secretary) and Dr Samid Suliman from Griffith University.

Five sites were searched and over 1,500 items discovered. The work was done in the early morning and late evening light. This gave a low light angle and painted the petroglyphs with light that created texture. It was this that allowed so many new objects to be found. It became a joke between Andrew and John as to how many minutes it would take from arriving on a site to find something new. The reality was it was seconds. The moment they stepped from their cars rock carvings popped out at them.

This proved the importance of such a project and we strongly believe that an exhaustive body of work needs to be created. This catalogue would prove the existence of every object, document its condition and location and be added to a mapping database to be used by stakeholders both traditional owners and defence.

SafeGround, Griffith University and Camerapro provided funding for the previous field visit to undertake the beginning of this work. We are currently preparing a complete budget and we are looking for funding to undertake this project fully and properly.

Another field mission will begin in mid April. A small team from SafeGround and the Kokatha will spend an undetermined amount of time in the desert documenting and finding new sites. Some of this work is so sensitive that we'll be working on locations that have never been documented and for now will stay secret as to their locations. These sites will be in some of South Australia's

most inhospitable areas which requires a full expedition to access.

The genesis of this project is also a valid bridge builder between the Kokatha People, Defence and SafeGround. Both the Base Commander and Kokatha recognise the importance of collaboration re the preservation of these places and objects. All parties also recognise that the missile testing range at Woomera does and will continue to exist into the future so finding a way to work together for the preservation of this ancient culture is the only functional way forward.

SafeGround is definitely up to the challenge of working within this space and undertaking the field work with the Kokatha. The long term key will be how to fund it into the future. But for now we work on the idea of 'Never let lack of money get in the way of a good idea'.

There is a lot to be proud of, but our work is far from over. Our small organisation will strive to make big differences in our efforts for a safer and more peaceful world.

SafeGround Committee, March 2024

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

The world's attention is currently split between two conflicts. Ukraine, where trenches, artillery and land mines again infect European plains and forests. Then Palestine, where the world watches in horror as Israel, ignoring the pleas of the ICJ, the international community and even recently their staunch ally the U.S, seems poised to annihilate the civilian refuge of Rafah. In both instances, years of work by rights campaigners are facing their greatest challenges in years.

In this issue, Heather Faulkner interviews Iva Zimova, a returning contributor who has been documenting the Ukrainian effort to demine its country, in "It's going to take 100 years to demine Ukraine." Closer to home, Miriam Deprez and Samid Suliman report on Kokatha land, culture and heritage across the Woomera Prohibited Area. Jeanne Wills, gives us an update on the Stop Killer Robots Campaign's work in the Pacific and new contributor Morgan Laffer reports from Cambodia where he spent

time documenting the recovery of people left permanently injured by ERWs.

This issue is particularly well rounded, spanning the globe we bring you snippets of some of the greater threats facing humanity and the work being done to address them. If you're a new reader, welcome. If you're returning, welcome back. Thankyou for being here, I hope you enjoy the issue.

In Hope,

Rhett Kleine,

Managing Editor



PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS STAND AGAINST AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

By Jeanne Wills

In a landmark development, the United Nations General Assembly's First Committee on Disarmament and International Security introduced its inaugural resolution on autonomous weapons systems. SafeGround was in action in New York, engaging with Pacific Island countries to address the critical concerns surrounding autonomous weapons and build support for the resolution.

On November 1, 2023, the First Committee cast its vote: 164 in favour, 5 against, 8 abstentions, and 16 recorded no vote. The resounding call for collective action to combat autonomous weapons echoed from all corners of the globe.

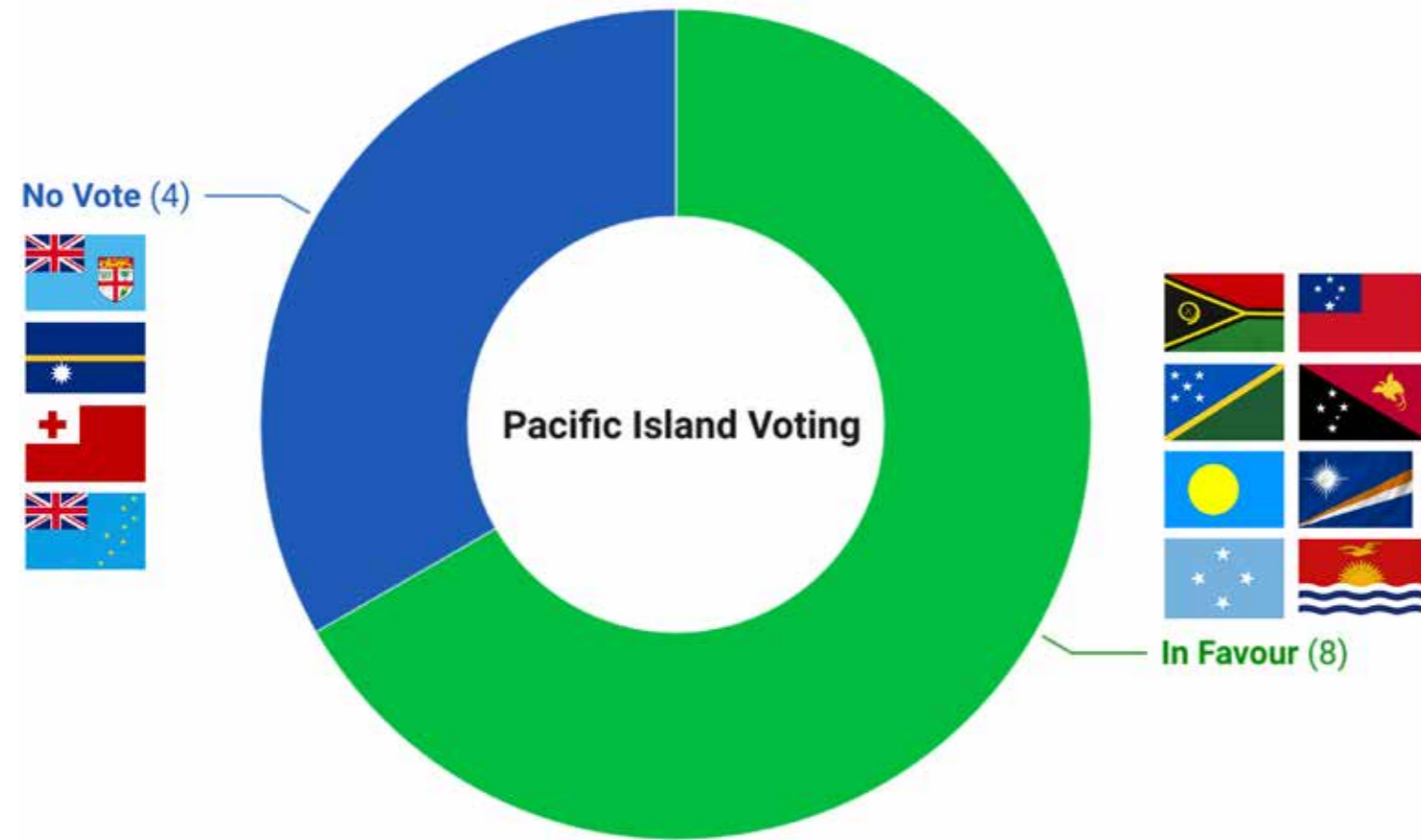
After the decade-long discourse on the issue, the Pacific now has a voice in this arena. Eight Pacific Island nations supported the resolution, with Fiji and Kiribati

co-sponsoring the initiative. Kiribati and Vanuatu raised concerns about autonomous weapons in their national statements to the First Committee. Notably, no Pacific Island nation opposed the resolution, with four recording no vote.

MAJORITY RULES

The lack of progress within the consensus-based Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) framework was overshadowed by the milestone outcome in the simple majority-based General Assembly.

General Assembly resolutions, deemed as "recommendations" under articles 10 and 14 of the UN



No Vote (4)



In Favour (8)



The Pacific Island First Committee delegations vote on the autonomous weapons resolution. November 2023



Charter, are non-binding expressions of member states' views, and serve as barometers of global norms and perspectives on global issues.

Unlike the CCW where militarised states have stalled progress, General Assembly resolutions are not bound by the limits of consensus voting. Majority-based voting in the General Assembly has already demonstrated the suitability of the format to progress discussions towards a legally binding instrument on autonomous weapons.

At the General Assembly, every state has an equal voice, irrespective of size, wealth or status to the CCW.

UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESOLUTION

The resolution acknowledges the rapid advancement of new technologies while emphasising the need to scrutinise and combat their impact from humanitarian, legal, security, technological, and ethical perspectives in the military domain.

It raises alarms about “the possible negative consequences and impact of autonomous weapons systems on global security and regional and international stability, including the risk of an emerging arms race, lowering the threshold for conflict and proliferation, including to non-State actors”.

The resolution sets the stage for negotiating new international law on autonomous weapons at the UNGA.

PACIFIC LEADERSHIP ON DISPLAY

Kiribati's Permanent Representative, Mr. Teburoro Tito addressed the First Committee on 10 October, 2023.

“...we are gravely concerned about the unconstrained development and use of autonomous weapons systems. They present unacceptable humanitarian, ethical and legal risks that the international community must urgently address.

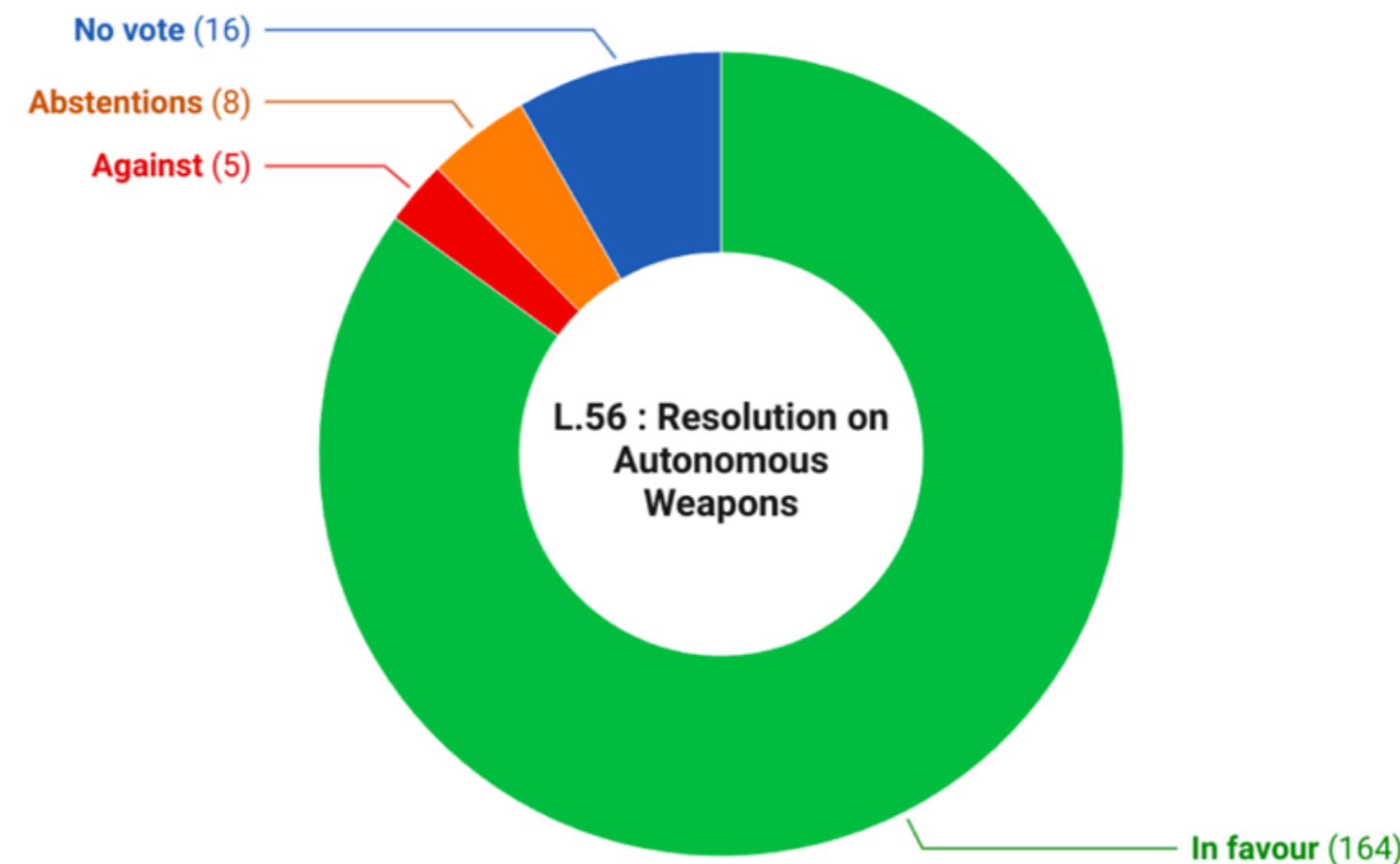
We recognise that there is a need for new rules to preserve human control over the use of force and the effects of these weapons. Such control is required under international humanitarian law.

For all other systems, there must be a combination of limits on the types of targets, duration, geographical scope, and scale and situations of use, as well as the requirement to ensure effective human supervision and timely intervention and deactivation.”

THE POWER OF THE PACIFIC VOICE ON AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

The Pacific Islands have a history scarred by weapons. Its people, sea and land are marked by explosive remnants of World War II and shadows of nuclear testing. Autonomous weapons pose a new challenge to the region.

Misuse of these weapons by non-state actors, alongside the lucrative drug market passing through the Pacific, heightens the urgency for proactive measures.



The nations of the world voting on the first UN resolution on autonomous weapons in November 2023. 164 nations were in favour at the UNGA First Committee.

1

Urges immediate global action on autonomous weapons, especially through the CCW, to better understand and address related challenges.

2

Asks the Secretary-General to gather input from Member and Observer States on various aspects of autonomous weapons, including humanitarian, legal, security, technological, and ethical concerns, and to present a comprehensive report ahead of the UN General Assembly 2024.

KEY OUTCOMES OF RESOLUTION L.56

3

Calls for input from international and regional organisations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, civil society, the scientific community, and industry, to be included in the report in its original language.

4

Adds "Lethal autonomous weapons systems" to the agenda of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly for discussion.

Sir Ronald Sanders, Ambassador of Antigua and Barbuda to the US, emphasises the threat of autonomous weapons to small island developing states.

"Imagining the use to which such autonomous weapons could be put by criminals, ..., should terrify everyone, especially law enforcement agencies such as the Police, and agencies concerned with fighting drug trafficking, people trafficking and other forms of crime."

Explosive remnants of war have been used during internal conflicts and are used regularly for illegal dynamite fishing. The accessibility of commercially available products for constructing autonomous weapons raises concerns about the potential harm to civilians and the environment.

Amid rising geopolitical tensions in the region, the US' 2024 Defense budget includes a US \$1.8 billion allocation for AI and machine learning. Senator Pat Murray, Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee (responsible for decisions related to US defence budget allocation), said, "This bill provides important new resources to make sure we maintain our edge as our competitors work to gain ground - with investments in our capabilities in critical regions like the Indo-Pacific and essential modernisation efforts."

Artificial intelligence and machine learning add another layer to climate change.

Although largely understudied, there are links between training AI systems producing significant carbon footprints. To fine-tune a system used to target humans, the utmost

'accuracy' is required. Imagine countless trials and errors of energy-intensive testing.

Research conducted at the University of Massachusetts performed a life cycle assessment for training several common large machine learning AI models. They found that the process can emit more than 626,000 pounds of carbon dioxide equivalent.

This is equivalent to the emissions of air travel for one person circumnavigating the earth over 65 times. And that is just for getting the model launch ready, before consumers start using it. In addition, military emissions are exempt from reporting emissions to the Paris Agreement and Kyoto Protocol. Military emissions reporting became voluntary and will most likely remain until directly addressed by global climate agreements. Meanwhile, in a 2022 estimate, 5.5% of total global emissions are attributed to the world's militaries.

As militarised states pursue these technologies, the Pacific Islands might shoulder the burden of environmental consequences and threats to humanity for the development and 'fine-tuning' of robots designed for destruction.

In her address to the Manila Meeting on Indo-Pacific Perspectives on Autonomous Weapons Systems held on December 13-14, 2023, Uduch Sengebau-Senior, Vice President and Minister for Justice of Palau, underscored concerns extending beyond mere battlefield casualties.

"Our economies are intricately linked to the well-being of our marine life. Autonomous weapons pose a clear and present danger to this fragile balance."

Why Pacific Island Nations Should Make a Submissions to the UN Secretary General's Report on Autonomous Weapons Systems

Machines are replacing humans in the ability to attack and kill targets, with unpredictable and devastating consequences. After 10 years of international discussions, on 1 November 2023, the UN General Assembly's First Committee adopted its first resolution on autonomous weapons systems, with overwhelming support; 164 states in favour and 5 against, with 8 abstentions. Pacific support for the resolution was resounding. Kiribati and Fiji co-sponsored the initiative, with Kiribati and Vanuatu making national statements. Eight Pacific Island nations voted in favour of the resolution.

The resolution calls on the UN Secretary General to prepare a substantive report, inviting states and stakeholders to share their views "on autonomous weapons systems and ways to address the related challenges and concerns they raise from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives and on the role of humans in the use of force".

Pacific Island nations' contributions to the Secretary General's report are invaluable. SafeGround has produced this brief to support Pacific Islands to make a submission and highlight why this is an important issue for the region.

AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS SYSTEMS EXPLAINED

Fully autonomous weapons (also known as 'killer robots') are systems that can detect, determine and attack targets, including destroy or kill, based on the processing of data from sensor inputs. In these systems, upon activation, there is a period of time where the weapon system can attack a target without additional human approval. The specific target, and the exact time and place of the attack, are determined by sensor processing, instead of an immediate human command. This means the human operator does not determine specifically where, when or against what force is applied and who is attacked.

Autonomous weapons systems change the relationship between people and technology by handing over life and death decision making to machines. Diminishing the control of the human operator undermines accountability and responsibility in conflict raises serious concerns over compliance with international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution in attacks.



WHY SHOULD PSIDS BE CONCERNED?

An international legal framework to safeguard against the dangers posed by autonomous weapons systems (AWS) does not currently exist. The lack of clear limits allows highly militarised states to develop and use such systems. This raises serious concerns for PSIDS, including:

INCREASED GLOBAL POWER IMBALANCES

- Through investments in sophisticated military technologies, militarised states will gain significant advantage over smaller states in the ability to conduct warfare
- Physical, psychological, socio-economic and humanitarian harm has been caused by testing and deployment of new weapons systems



NON-STATE ACTORS

- Pacific Islands face unique vulnerabilities to non-state actors
- AWS could be exploited by non-state actors for illicit activities such as drug trafficking
- There is clear danger that this technology will become available for unauthorised use and proliferate globally



ACCOUNTABILITY & JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS

- Responsibility and liability for the effects of the weapon cannot be easily assigned to the human operator
- This would make providing justice to victims and communities caught in the crossfire of conflict, weapons testing or AWS deployment even harder
- AWS would further undermine accountability upon perpetrators of violence



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT & CLIMATE CHANGE

- Historically, the testing and use of military technologies have caused long lasting damage to the environment
- Research suggests that training artificial intelligence and machine learning models carry significant carbon footprints
- Militaries are major contributors to carbon emissions yet are often excluded from global climate agreements



RACIAL & GENDER BIAS

- Autonomous weapons rely on the processing of data from sensors to engage, attack and kill
- This process can lead to systematic prejudice due to racial, gender, and other algorithmic bias that permeates artificial intelligence systems
- Marginalised communities are disproportionately harmed by the automation of decision making processes



UNDERMINING HUMAN DIGNITY

- Allowing machines to make life and death decisions based on sensor inputs in a machine dehumanises people
- The 2021 Interfaith Statement on Killer Robots states:

"Our shared belief in the inalienable dignity of the human person and the inestimable worth of human life demands our vigilance toward new forms of military technology ... An urgent and firm rejection of the development of fully autonomous weapons is essential to preserving our shared humanity."



WHAT CAN PSIDS DO?

Pacific Island nations should consider making a submission that:

- Supports negotiations for a legally binding instrument with prohibitions and regulations.
 - Prohibitions on weapons systems that would target people
 - Prohibitions on weapons systems that cannot be used with meaningful human control
 - Regulations on all other weapons systems to ensure they are effectively controlled, understood and limit the area and duration of their use.
- Introduces and addresses a unique Pacific context and associated issues specific to the region which could include environmental concerns, non-state actors, and non-conflict contexts.

The Secretary General's report is an opportunity to capture the view of a broad range of states, particularly those yet to articulate national positions or regions not broadly represented in the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, where the past 10 years of discussions have taken place. Through collective action, the Pacific region can present a united front against development and deployment of autonomous weapons, advocating for a legally binding instrument and addressing Pacific related concerns.

We thank you for your consideration and support. For additional information contact:

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"Security requires more than just powerful weapons. Building trust, sharing resources, and healing wounds of the past are equally important."

TOWARDS A LEGALLY BINDING FUTURE

Facing these challenges amid rising geopolitical tensions in the region, Pacific Island advocacy and representation in global discussions is pivotal. The UN General Assembly in global discussions is pivotal. The UN General Assembly serves as a platform for these nations to exert influence and advocate for a secure and sustainable future, where advanced technologies are used for good.

States are recognising the need for collective action outside veto-powered forums to robustly address autonomous weapons. Momentum is building towards a legally binding instrument. SafeGround, in collaboration with Pacific states, will work towards submitting views to the Secretary General, reflecting Pacific-specific concerns. The journey continues with a renewed focus on the 2024 UNGA.

A three page briefing paper for the Pacific on Autonomous Weapons Systems. This paper was developed by SafeGround as part of our Stop Killer Robots Campaign grant.

'Why Pacific Island Nations Should Make a Submissions to the UN Secretary General's Report on Autonomous Weapons Systems'



The Carbon Footprint of Autonomous Weapons Systems (AWS)

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AWS

The central element of any autonomous weapon is the software.

Machine learning is surging with developments in image, text and behavioural analysis. These applications include intelligence gathering and target recognition to identify people, objects or patterns.



THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Training artificial intelligence and machine learning models carries significant carbon footprints. And that is just for getting the model ready to launch, before any consumers start using it. The carbon footprint of developing, training and deploying autonomous weapons is unknown.

A 2019 study¹ estimates CO₂ emissions from training common natural language processor models such as the 'transformer', which is the model behind ChatGPT. Below are some comparisons.

1. Strubell, E., Ganesh, A., & McCallum, A. (2019). Energy and policy considerations for deep learning in NLP. In Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics (pp. 3645-3650).

Just training a 'transformer' model with neural architecture search



is estimated to emit the same CO₂ emissions as ...



... aeroplane travel for one passenger travelling return from Micronesia to Tonga 308 times



... aeroplane travel for one passenger circumnavigating earth 65.5 times



... 56 average human lives in 1 year

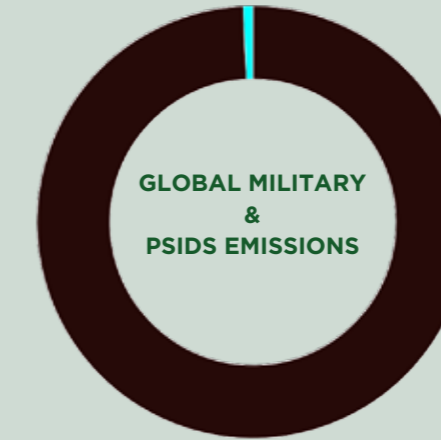
EXEMPTIONS FROM REPORTING

Despite their significance, military emissions remain unreported in international climate agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement¹. The development, training, and use of autonomous weapons systems for military purposes will follow the same pattern.

Although AI holds immense potential for positive global change, training and using it to employ force poses a confronting moral and ethical problem while increasing the climate crisis.

1. Parkinson, S. (2021). The Carbon Footprint of the Military. Presentation for Merseyside Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, June 3.

■ Minimum Estimated Global Military Emissions 2022
■ PSIDS Combined Emissions 2020



Data Source: Integrated Carbon Observation System | Conflict and Environment Observatory

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S REPORT ON AUTONOMOUS WEAPONS

States are invited to share their views "on autonomous weapons systems and ways to address the related challenges and concerns they raise from humanitarian, legal, security, technological and ethical perspectives and on the role of humans in the use of force".

Make Pacific nations' views on the climate impacts of autonomous weapons development a key focus of the UN Secretary General's report.

SafeGround distributed this information sheet on autonomous weapons and climate change to the 12 Pacific Island delegations at the UN New York ahead of the deadline for submissions to the UN Secretary General's report on autonomous weapons systems.



IT'S GOING TO TAKE A HUNDRED YEARS TO DEMINE UKRAINE

Interview with Czech-Canadian documentary photographer and human rights worker, Iva Zimová

By Heather Faulkner

I have known documentary photographer, Iva Zimová, since the mid-90s when we met as photojournalists in Prague, Czech Republic. We struck up a friendship over our strong anti-war ethos, our love of black-and-white photography, and good storytelling. In between assignments, Iva would stay at our small apartment in Prague, and we would enjoy her amazing stories and wonderful Palačinky (Czech crepes) for breakfast. She would accompany me on projects and critique my images – she has an excellent eye and remains a

great mentor. When we left Prague for Brisbane, Australia, Iva was heading to Iraq. In those early days, we stayed in touch via e-mail and sometimes via phone calls from a satellite phone she borrowed from the NGO, lent by, and doubtlessly monitored by the US military. One afternoon the phone rang. It was Iva, from Iraq. “Did you hear, they caught the bastard,” she yelled down the line. “Yes,” I yelled back, having just watched the capture of Saddam Hussein on the morning news. I could hear gunfire in the distance from Iva’s compound. “Where are you standing,” I asked with a bit of concern. “I’m on the roof – better reception here,” she said. “But they are shooting, so maybe I go down the stairs...” A minute later, a cacophony of kookaburras broke out in chortled laughter, and Iva heard it. “What the hell is that?” I explained it was a family of kookaburras.



“That scared the hell out of me! Those are some crazy birds!” Kookaburras and gunfire. That’s us.

Having escaped Czechoslovakia in the early 80s, Iva found refuge in Canada, settling in Montreal to study photography at Dawson College. While lauded in her new country for her stunning black-and-white reportage, as soon as Soviet occupation ended in her homeland, she was back to cover the burgeoning democracies of former Soviet states.

We caught up recently on a video call – she from the Prague office of the People In Need Foundation (PINF),



and I from my home studio in Brisbane. Iva has been covering Ukraine since 1989, including its official independence in 1991.

I ask her what changes she’s witnessed in that quarter century of revival. “For sure it’s changed so much – visually. Economically, the cities have changed a bit too, they are cleaner, and there are restaurants, shops, supermarkets, and roads. The people have changed a lot. They’re no longer afraid to speak, they talk freely about politics. You now can tell who is pro-Russian, they are aggressive and don’t want to talk to you. Those who are pro-Ukrainian are happy to talk about politics – even if they support a different politician than Zelensky. Those pro-Russian blame Ukraine for all the bombing and destruction – it was them who did this.” Disinformation campaigns are part of Putin’s strategy to overtake Ukraine. “But who wants to be under dictatorship when you can’t speak, can’t travel,” says Iva. And she knows first-hand what that was like.

In early 2014, Iva joined prominent Czech journalist and human rights worker, Petra Procházková, to cover the Euromaidan protests in Kyiv. She later worked with the Czech NGO People in Need Foundation (PINF), in both Ukrainian-held and occupied territories – giving aid to both sides. “NGOs don’t care if a babushka [grandmother] is pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian; she has to eat so we help her,” says Iva.

Earlier this year Iva was invited to document HALO Trust’s two-week mine-detection training course for



Page 14; Ukraine map shows contamination since full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022.

Photo Iva Zimová

A portrait of Olexander in front of minefield. Olexander had a mine clearance course, later he took a paramedic deminer course. Today he is an instructor, teaching students how to clear mines. The course is not easy, it lasts 25 days and ends with an exam.

Photo Iva Zimová

A 'home-made' remote-controlled mine-clearance tractor with armour that withstands blasts protecting its body.

Mines in Kharkiv Oblast remained in many fields, it is perilous for farmers to sow grain for the next harvest. Many farmers have come up with a novel way to remove mines left in fields after Russians retreated

Photo Iva Zimová.



Alexey poses for a photo in front of the 'home-made' remote-controlled mine-clearance tractor with armour that withstands blasts protecting its body.

Mines in Kharkiv Oblast remained in many fields, it is perilous for farmers to sow grain for the next harvest. Many farmers have come up with a novel way to remove mines left in fields after Russians retreated. So far this tractor has destroyed 20 mines in one field. The other fields were clean.

Photo Iva Zimová

Ukrainians. “Not everyone passes the exam. It’s a long process with a lot of processes. There are Slovakian Bozena [Bozena-4 Demining Units], two machines that can excavate the bombs. But they are used by the military. Farmers are left to fend for themselves, without the Bozena,” says Iva, referring to the ingenuity of the farmers desperate to get back to their fields. They have designed their own remote-controlled bomb clearance machines, adapting tractors with bomb-digging ploughs and armour. Still, some farmers resort to digging out the mines themselves. “Some are lucky, some are not.”

“I feel like it’s more mined than Afghanistan today,” says Iva, who has documented Afghanistan for over twenty years. “Both sides are laying mines.”

Both Russia and Ukraine have been using landmines in the war, despite Ukraine being a signatory to the 1997 Land Mine Ban Treaty (also known as the Ottawa Treaty).

According to Human Rights Watch, Ukraine’s request for US cluster munitions was granted on June 7, 2023, when US President Joe Biden [signed](#) a “determination” that “the transfer of cluster munitions to Ukraine was necessary for the national security interests of the United States.” A transfer of an “unspecified number of cluster munitions, that have a greater than one per cent unexploded ordnance rate,” was authorised.

Iva has witnessed first-hand the effects of cluster munitions in the Ukraine. “The problem is the Russians are using little green cluster munitions – made of plastic so metal detectors can’t find them. Russians use them

against civilians, while Ukraine uses them against [the Russian] army.”

She recalls the recent funeral of land-mine victim, Denis Edyardovich, a former national kickboxing champion and a volunteer of the Platsdarm NGO and Black Tulip Mission. Edyardovich’s vehicle ran over a plastic-encased anti-tank land mine during a recovery mission to retrieve the bodies of deceased Ukrainian and Russian soldiers. Black Tulip was established as a volunteer organization with the initial purpose of retrieving the bodies of Ukrainian soldiers from World War 1 and World War 2. Since the invasion of Crimea in 2014, it has operated in the areas of Donetsk and Luhansk, retrieving the bodies of soldiers who died in this 21st-century war.

“He was very young,” says Iva of Edyardovich. She photographed his funeral. She has been documenting the Black Tulip volunteers since 2014. “That was one, but there are a lot,” she says. “Sometimes it’s a cluster munition – it doesn’t kill you but you lose limbs. It costs money to get rid of them.” Not knowing whether land is safe to plough, paths safe to walk, or roof-tops safe from cluster bombs makes regeneration after the war a hazardous prospect, and it plays heavily on the minds of all affected. “It’s a slow and psychological problem.”

“It’s going to take a hundred years to demine Ukraine. It’s like Bosnia Herzegovina – the fields are being cleared, but the forests....”

But Ukraine is the breadbasket of the world. And Ukrainian farmers are wonderfully persistent. “The

*Far right: A demining expert from HALO Trust detecting for the presence of a landmine. Manual mine clearance requires high level of concentration. Deminer has to sustain high levels of attention to details
Photo Iva Zimová.*



A farmer field with anti-tank mines that are properly labeled. Anti tank mines were hidden in the grass, which is now mowed.

For now, these mines remain in place. The reason is that there could be booby traps placed under them
Photo Iva Zimová.



Ukrainians are growing tomatoes at the checkpoints. Even during Euromaidan they were growing tomatoes and potatoes next to their tents.” She tells a joke about a future Ukrainian mission to Mars. “What is Ukraine going to do on Mars?” Her eyes twinkle at me from the video screen. “Farming.” I laugh, and she laughs, before taking a more serious tone. “The elections are in March – so there are going to be a lot more bombs.”

Tensions are mounting within the halls of power in the Ukraine. The war is beginning to cause pessimism and dangerous factions. “How can Ukraine attack Russia without planes? NATO is not doing enough,” she says of some Ukrainian sentiments. “Putin is on the horse

again – that’s no good. If he wins, he’ll go for Moldova and the Baltics. That’s what I think.”

Iva Zimová works with the Czech NGO, People In Need Foundation (<https://www.peopleinneed.net/>), and is represented by Panos Pictures.

NOTE: This interview was made on December 19, 2023. Since that time, Iva has returned to Ukraine and documented the intensive aerial bombing by Russia across the country at the start of the new year.

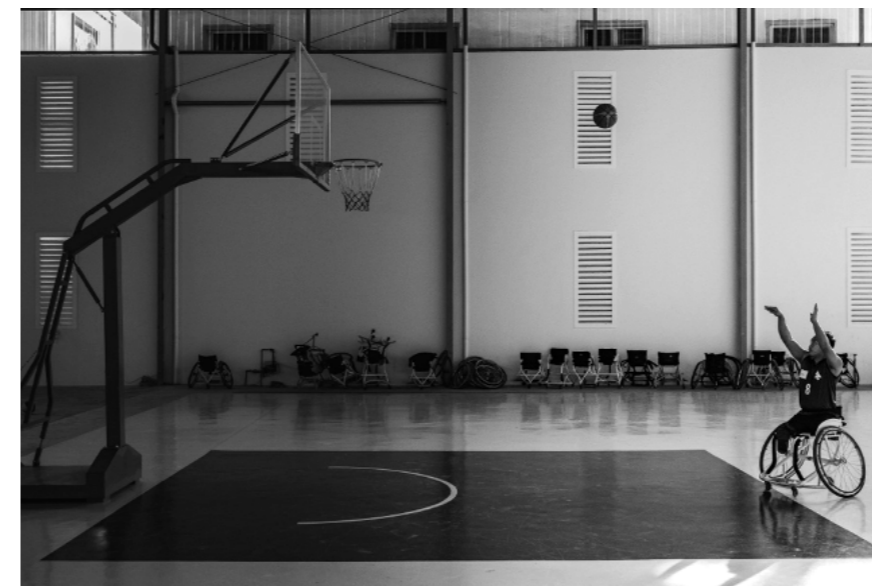
THE HEALING FIELDS

Cambodia, Jan 2023

By Morgan Laffer

The Cambodian people have endured relentless conflicts and extraordinary violence throughout the latter three decades of the 20th century; death and destruction loomed as constant shadows over their lives. The nation has been ravaged by civil wars, foreign invasions, oppression, civil strife, and a U.S. bombing campaign that, in an attempt to deter North Vietnamese Army supply routes, dropped 230,516 bombs on 113,716 Cambodian sites between 1965 and 1973. These events have collectively resulted in suffering comparable to only a handful of other nations in the 20th century. Now a peaceful country, it is a sombre reality to acknowledge that, even generations later, Cambodians still bear the heavy burden of war.

Between 1979 and 2022, the impact of landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERWs) have reverberated through Cambodia. Claiming 19,818 lives while leaving an additional 45,186 individuals either injured or forced to endure the agonizing reality of amputation. Despite half of Cambodia's contaminated areas having now been cleared, it is estimated that 5 million landmines and other unexploded ordinances lie dormant across the country's landscape. Plagued by the legacy of indiscriminate weapons, the country has the highest ratio of amputees per capita in the world, with survivors frequently confronting barriers when it comes to accessing education, vocational training, job opportunities, as well as essential physical and mental health care services. Efforts to clear these deadly remnants, provide aid to victims, and promote awareness about the dangers of landmines and ERWs remain imperative to this day, as Cambodia strives to heal from its tragic past and build a safer future for its citizens.





AUTOMATED GROWING PAINS

By Rhett Kleine

In December 2023 *the Guardian Australia* reported that a 74-year-old woman was declared dead, twice, by Services Australia's automated systems. The mistake resulted in the elderly woman without access to her finances and other assets including the pension she is paid to care for her husband. As the international conversation around automation and AI continues, this is an example of how even civil automation without human oversight, can destroy lives.

The woman referred to as Eve, was left 'sleepless' and 'very distressed,' according to her lawyer, exacerbating her already high levels of anxiety. She was unable to pay for medication, call Ubers for transport or even have family members send her money as her bank accounts were closed when Services Australia contacted her bank after listing her

as deceased. Services Australia apologised for the mistake saying "If a human error occurs, we have processes in place to take steps to prevent them from happening again. This includes feedback and training for individuals." However, the spokesperson did not have anything to say about their automated systems.

It was only last year that the catastrophic Robodebt scheme once again graced national headlines. The politicians and public servants identified by the Royal Commission as being responsible for the illegal scheme, attributed by some to several suicides, came under increased scrutiny in the media. However, the important conversation around the issues with automation throughout the failed scheme went largely unaddressed.

Automation is fast becoming a mainstay in many parts of our lives. From services to shopping, to the far more dubious use of automation in lethal weaponry. Multiple countries, including Australia, have bodies that have developed strategies, principles, and guidelines for the use of automation and AI in civil and military capacities. Many of these guidelines listed in a report and Automated Decisions from the Automated Decision Research reach an overwhelming consensus that human oversight is vital. Human Rights Watch in their report on 'Killer Robots' discussed the importance of accountability when it comes to weapons with autonomous lethal capacities. "No accountability means no deterrence of future crimes, no retribution for victims, no social condemnation of the responsible party... [T]he many obstacles to justice for potential victims show why we urgently need to ban fully autonomous weapons." From the use of automation on the battlefield to the use of automation in civil services, the need for human oversight and accountability is a mounting concern as we automate and integrate AI into our lives.

One of the more pressing conversations for the international community regarding AI and automation is how they are used in systems with lethal capacities. Israel is already well known for utilising AI surveillance and facial recognition in their occupation of Palestinian territories. The 2021 war in Gaza was described by Israeli officials as "The first AI War" due to the IDF's extensive use of AI systems during the conflict. The recent fighting in Gaza has seen the use of AI in the IDF's indiscriminate bombing

campaign of the Gaza Strip. The Guardian reported that the IDF's system "The Gospel" is a database that records and suggests potential targets. One official described its effectiveness "To put that into perspective, in the past we would produce 50 targets in Gaza per year. Now, this machine produces 100 targets a single day, with 50% of them being attacked." However, criticism has been levelled at the system, with one source familiar with the IDF's use of the system describing it as a "mass assassination factory." The Stop Killer Robots Campaign have described the use of the system as "digital dehumanisation." Expressing their concern that the system is not in compliance with humanitarian law and is part of a concerning trend of AI systems being utilised in lethal capacities without proper oversight or ethical restraints.

In all facets of life, automation is weaving itself into the way we do things, and this comes with its own set of challenges. Everything from ethics to the practicalities we juggle day to day will undergo dramatic shifts. What's imperative, as we undergo the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution,' the 'AI Revolution' is that we don't substitute efficiency for humanity. Like anything AI is not inherently good or bad but merely has the potential to be both. Either way we go about it, AI is to change life as we know it. As we look toward a future dominated by automation and AI from the battlefield to the service desk, proper transparency, ethical consideration, and oversight need to be at the forefront of how we integrate AI into our lives.



CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE RED ZONE:

Documenting Kokatha Sacred Sites in the Woomera Prohibited Area

By Miriam Deprez and Samid Suliman

Looking out over the vast expanse of the Lake Hart salt pan, it is easy to understand why the Kokatha people hold significant ties to this site. Lake Hart and its surroundings are an integral part of Kokatha land and people, who have long made their homes in and around the region's salt lakes, connecting with ancestral beings along the songlines that run through this country. Yet, looking down at our feet and straining our eyes, we begin to visually sift small foreign fragments out of the sand and rock. Bullet shells, wiring and casings litter the ground. Within a few minutes, senior Kokatha lore man, Andrew Starkey, holds up a handful of spent bullets, grimacing at this latest barrage of tiny incursions onto the shores of the sacred lake.

Despite being their ancestral homeland for millennia, the Kokatha people's country, including this sacred lake and its surrounding environs, has been enveloped – swallowed, even – by another territorial entity: the world's largest land-based weapons testing range; the Woomera Prohibited Area (WPA). Far from prying public eyes, yet spanning an impressive 127,000 square kilometres, the Woomera Prohibited Area (WPA) has earned the nickname "Australia's Area 51" in reference to the highly classified United States Airforce facility in Nevada. The WPA was once infamous for accommodating the UK's nuclear weapons tests from 1956-63 at the Maralinga and Emu Field sites, as well as the development of military rockets and space projects.





While nuclear testing has been discontinued, the WPA continues to be used for other weapons testing, which is an ever-present threat to the hundreds of culturally significant sites within this zone.

For Andrew Starkey, the Woomera Range Complex, and indeed the entire WPA, is sacred land. For two weeks, Andrew guided us through the [Red Zone](#) (the segment of the WPA gazetted for continuous and exclusive military use), visiting sites important to the Kokatha people: Wild Dog Creek, Eucolo Creek, Lake Hart West and South, Nurrungar and Koolymilka. With Andrew as our guide, we

photographed sacred petroglyphs and rock art complexes and found areas full of Indigenous artefacts. Each day we aimed to shoot at sunrise and sunset, arriving at our destinations in time to capture the slanting rays as they cast their gentle light over the petroglyphs; the golden beams of light provide the relief needed for the best shooting opportunities. This also meant that Andrew also saw things in a new light, discovering petroglyphs that he had never seen before, and – to his knowledge – had never been photographed. Through Andrew’s storytelling, we learned the petroglyphs and natural formations are all part of the Tjukurpa (a term used by First Nations peoples to describe the journeys and activities of ancestral beings during the creation time) that run throughout the Western Desert. The idea that this landscape was empty of humans, culture, or civilisation under the doctrine of terra nullius—the justification used to turn this land into a site of ongoing violence—is refuted by these petroglyphs, art, artefacts, and structures, which are ample evidence that this is a place that has been inhabited by an organised society for many thousands of years.

The WPA’s military history and legacy cannot be understated. In 1957, Woomera was selected as the launch site for the European Launcher Development Organisation (ELDO), thus becoming a worldwide hub for space activities. During its heyday, Woomera was second only to NASA’s Cape Canaveral in Florida in terms of rocket launches worldwide. Amidst the burgeoning Cold War space race, the shores of



Lake Hart became the epicentre of Western Allies’ celestial ambitions in the antipodes. Woomera was also once home to the Joint Defence Facility Nurrungar, used as a space-based surveillance station for “launch on warning” monitoring of enemy intercontinental ballistic missiles and other rocket launches, which made it an essential component of American defences during the Cold War. Not surprisingly, Nurrungar’s strategic significance meant it was also ranked in the Soviet Union’s top ten targets for nuclear attack during

this period. British atomic weapons tests were conducted in the western reaches of the WPA, which left indelible (and radioactive) scars on the landscape and caused irreparable harm to Indigenous peoples’ connection to the country (as documented in Elizabeth Tynan’s important account *Atomic Thunder*).

More recently, there has been a dramatic increase in activity on the Woomera rocket range. In 2016, then-prime minister Malcolm Turnbull promised Woomera

would be transformed into the “most advanced military test range in the world”, as he pledged a \$297 million investment in the WPA. This investment signalled that the WPA would continue its decades-long secretive role as a testing range for destructive war materiel well into the future. In addition to its core business of testing long-range ballistic weapons and other ‘traditional’ weapons systems, conducting live-fire exercises, and launching rockets and

satellites for both civilian and military use, the WPA is also being used to test weapons of the future, including electromagnetic spectrum weapons and unmanned drones.

In 2014, a joint project between BAE Systems and UK defence tested their “[Taranis Drone](#)”. Unmanned and supersonic, the Taranis stealth bomber drone is designed to carry a weapons payload of guided missiles and bombs guided by satellite. The current Albanese government is

also accelerating the development of another autonomous aircraft, the “[Ghost Bat](#)” by Boeing Australia for the Royal Australian Air Force. Both the Ghost Bat and the Taranis are raising concerns over the ethics of modern warfare, but their development continues unabated and unscrutinised behind the [legislative veil of secrecy](#) that protects the WPA from prying eyes. Also tested in the WPA, along with hypersonic weaponry, is the RAAF’s F-35 fighter jet,

which is manufactured by the world’s largest weapons manufacturer Lockheed Martin.

From afar, the WPA appears to be a well-regulated, safe and secure space that satisfies the needs of all parties who claim rights to the lands contained therein. The 2014 Native Title determination putatively ensures that the cultural heritage of the Kokatha people can be protected, and the WPA ‘Coexistence Framework’ is intended to keep



the protection of the cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples across the WPA front and centre. However in January 2021, a group of Kokatha traditional owners conducting heritage-site inspections discovered a [high-tech missile](#) in Lake Hart West, a location where Defence says it does not test weapons. The missile was eventually determined to be inactive. However, the Department of Defence has not provided any information on how it ended up at Lake Hart West. Frustrated with the lack of transparency over the circumstances by which this ordnance came to be where it was discovered, and with its protracted removal, Andrew Starkey (with his brother Robert Starkey) has initiated [complaint proceedings through the OECD](#) (specifically regarding its [Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#)).

During our time in Kokatha country, we saw clear violations of the Department of Defence's own "[Clean Range Policy](#)" which is an agreement between Defence and the Indigenous communities to keep the WPA free from testing debris and other materiel, by cleaning up and removing such contamination once testing and other live training activities have been completed. At a firing range at the northeastern edge of Lake Hart, we found bullet shells, wiring and casings littering the ground. Along the southern end of Lake Hart, we found a section of a rocket booster, about three metres long, with "US ARMY" painted along the shaft. Andrew says that piece of rocket has most likely been there for over two decades. Whilst these may seem like insignificant incursions into the land, they are symptoms of a broader sentiment of disregard

for the First Peoples who lived here, and the violence that this range continues to enact upon them and their Country. Listening to Andrew's stories, we realised that he and his community feel the ongoing trauma of a deep wound that was not only inflicted by the displacement and dispossession of his ancestors and the cumulative impacts of debris and fallout on lands and people but also kept open by the transformation of Kokatha country into a militarised zone where weapons of war are tried and tested. Weapons that are used on other people, in other lands.

The more we spent time with Andrew, the more we realised the sombre situation faced by future generations of Kokatha people. The tenuous system that is in place to protect Indigenous cultural heritage from extractive industries such as mining and pastoralism – under the Defence's "[Coexistence Framework](#)" – means that the Kokatha people are at the whim of the Defence Force; historically, this has not panned out well. Paradoxically, the strongest defence against threats to Kokatha heritage is provided by the exclusive (and explosive) Defence use of the WPA's Red Zone, which is not subject to any form of transparency or accountability (other than the dogged efforts of Andrew Starkey to remind the WPA's stakeholders of their responsibilities to respect and protect his people's cultural heritage). Even South Australia's [Aboriginal Heritage Act](#), which, as the name suggests, was designed to protect and preserve Aboriginal heritage, has proved to provide little protection since its promulgation in 1988 (and is ultimately trumped by Commonwealth legislation governing the use

of the WPA). It's a precarious position. The Kokatha people have little option but to rely on the WPA Red Zone to ensure that other threats from other industries are kept at bay, rather than a government that wants to put the protection of these extraordinary cultural heritage sites over corporate profits and military might. With the increasing use of the Woomera Range Complex to meet the demand created by the insatiable appetite of the military-industrial complex, and the insistence that 'national security' trumps all other concerns, you have to wonder whether this is a sustainable way of preserving Kokatha heritage and conserving the fragile desert ecosystems that are integral to their culture.

This project was a collaboration between SafeGround, CameraPro's Explorers Grant, and Griffith University's Disrupting Violence Beacon. The team members are Andrew Starkey, John Rodsted, Mette Eliseussen, Dr Samid Suliman and Miriam Deprez.

All photos in this article Miriam Deprez





ADVOCATING SAFETY & SECURITY

My Journey with SafeGround in Honiara Thus Far

By Maeverlyn Kabolo Pitano

In July of 2023, a chance encounter with Kimberley McCosker and Mette Eliseussen, representing SafeGround, in the bustling city of Honiara, marked the beginning of a transformative journey for me. Little did I know that this meeting would spark a fervent passion for advocating a safer environment and the security of individuals in my community.

SafeGround's unwavering dedication to promoting safety in communities once ravaged by conflict, such as Honiara, resonated deeply with me. Their commitment to addressing the presence of unexploded ordnance (UXO) and other remnants of World War II struck a chord, evoking memories of a near-fatal incident that left me

with enduring physical impairments.

Reflecting on this experience, I recognized the urgent need to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in our community. With each passing day, my resolve to support SafeGround's mission strengthened, propelling me into action.

NETWORK FOR VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

Over the past three months, I've actively engaged in SafeGround's initiatives, spreading awareness about the importance of safety measures within my family and friends. Establishing a network for victims and survivors of explosive



ordnance incidents has been a significant achievement, and I aspire for this network to expand across the Solomon Islands, offering support to those affected.

My aspirations extend beyond personal advocacy. I aim to immerse myself in community outreach programs and advocate for policy changes at the local level, leveraging my personal experiences as a catalyst for positive change. Through my involvement with SafeGround, I anticipate connecting with fellow survivors, advocates, and like-minded individuals who share our common goal of creating a safer, more secure environment. Together, we will work tirelessly to raise awareness about UXO dangers, provide support to victims and survivors, and advocate for the implementation of national mine action standards.

Reflecting on my four-month journey with SafeGround, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the progress we've achieved. The courses I completed in March 2024, including "Introduction to Explosive Ordnance Essentials," "Introduction to Gender and Diversity in Mine Actions," "Understanding International Mine Action Standards (IMAS)," and "Practical First Aid," have equipped me with valuable knowledge and skills, preparing me to advance SafeGround's goals within the country.

Though challenges lie ahead, I remain steadfast in my commitment to advocating safety and security in my country. I believe each step we take will bring us closer to our shared vision of a safer, more resilient community.

My journey with SafeGround has not only transformed my life but has also instilled in me a sense of purpose

and empowerment. Together with the Victim/Survivors network group, I believe we have the power to shape the future of our community and create a lasting legacy of safety and security for generations to come.

As we continue to collaborate with SafeGround, we will work hand in hand to build a brighter, safer future for Honiara and beyond.

CONNECTING WITH SAFE SIGNALS UXO THREAT SOLUTIONS. SOLOMON ISLANDS.

I was taken aback when Michael Macca from Safe Signals offered me a position to join his team. Being handpicked by a local firm in the Solomon Islands that advocates for the eradication of UXO threats and contamination is an invaluable opportunity for me. It aligns perfectly with my newly developed passion for advocating a safer environment and changing behaviours regarding UXO presence.

In my role as a corporate reporter for Safe Signals, I am eager to contribute positively to the mission of both Safe Signals and SafeGround. Together, we will approach the issue of UXOs holistically, ensuring the safety and security of women, girls, boys, and men in my community and beyond.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED:

UXO Presence Assessment:

Recognizing the severity of UXO presence is paramount, not



just in Honiara but in any community. Thorough assessments are crucial to identify high-risk areas. By forming strategic partnerships with local authorities and international experts, we can effectively map out contaminated areas, providing essential data for targeted clearance efforts.

UXO Clearance Operations:

Armed with a clear understanding of UXO hotspots, operational teams can lead clearance operations to rid these

areas of dangerous remnants of war. Following international mine action standards and protocols is essential. Highly trained teams meticulously detect, assess, and safely dispose of UXO, minimising risks to the community and restoring peace of mind to residents.

Victim Assistance and Support:

The devastating impact of UXO incidents on individuals and families cannot be understated. Comprehensive victim

Page 38; Maeveryn Kabolo Pitano
Photo Mette Eliseussen

A chance encounter: In July 2023 SafeGround sent a small team to Honiara to explore the possibilities for Solomon Islands to accede to the Convention on Cluster Munitions. This was done as part of the ICBL-CMC 'Investing in Action' project. We connected with and interviewed key stakeholders. Here Mette Eliseussen, and Kim McCosker met with Maeveryn Kabolo Pitano. Photo Mette Eliseussen



assistance and support services, provided by government and stakeholders, are imperative. From immediate medical aid to long-term rehabilitation and socio-economic integration, survivors must receive the care and resources needed to rebuild their lives.

Adherence to International Mine Action Standards:

Upholding international mine action standards is crucial for excellence in clearance operations. All local and international clearance authorities must strictly adhere to these standards, ensuring operations are conducted safely, efficiently, and ethically. By maintaining rigorous standards, trust and confidence are upheld among local communities and international stakeholders, fostering collaboration in our mission for a safer environment.

Explosive Ordnance Risk Education:

Prevention is key in minimising UXO risks, and stakeholders like SafeGround play a pivotal role in education efforts.

Through targeted awareness campaigns, interactive workshops, and educational materials, stakeholders equip individuals with the knowledge and skills to identify, avoid, and report UXO hazards. Empowering communities to protect themselves and others is paramount in preventing harm.

Land Management and Rehabilitation:

Beyond clearance operations, ensuring sustainable management and rehabilitation of cleared land is essential. Collaboration with local authorities and community stakeholders is key. Organisations shall facilitate the safe return of cleared land to productive use, whether for agriculture, infrastructure development, or community spaces. This contributes to the socio-economic development and resilience of our city, promoting a safer environment for all.

PUBLISHED 25 MARCH 2024 · MILITARISATION

Militarised Brisbane: weapons manufacturers, university partnerships and grass-roots activism

Miriam Deprez



At about 9 am on Monday 8th January, in an industrial outer suburb of Brisbane, roughly thirty activists took over the Ferra Engineering manufacturing floor. Banners read “Ferra Spreads Terror” and “Stop Arming Israel” as the protesters shut down, albeit temporarily, the Ferra production line.

The suburb of Tingalpa seems a long way from the Middle East, but has found itself as part of the global supply chain for lethal weapons manufacturing. Ferra Engineering is the sole manufacturer of the Alternate Mission Equipment (AME) weapons bay adapters – the mechanisms that hold and release the bombs carried by the F-35 jet fighters, currently being dropped on civilians in Gaza.

MILITARISED BRISBANE

By Mette Eliseussen

On the 25th of March, SafeGround’s Secretary Miriam Deprez published an article about increasing militarisation in literary journal “Overland” called “[Militarised Brisbane: weapons manufacturers, university partnerships and grass-roots activism](#)”.

UNIVERSITIES BECOMING BREEDING GROUND FOR AUTONOMOUS WEAPON SYSTEMS

We hope to engage students in universities becoming a breeding ground for autonomous weapon systems. This is something we are concerned about. If you are a student or lecturer at one of these universities and share our concern, please get in touch with us info@safeground.org.au

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