



23 October 2014 – 'An armed drone, controlled by a human from a distance, can hardly do what police officers are supposed to do – use the minimum force required by the circumstances, assist those who need help, etc.,' said UN Special Rapporteur Christof Heyns during the presentation of his report on the use of armed drones for law enforcement.

Drones are becoming increasingly popular. Dozens of YouTube clips show the remote-controlled aircraft, which can be easily bought online, hovering over populated areas including big cities like [London](#) . German delivery firm DHL even announced the first regular [drone delivery service](#) , nine months after it launched its 'parcelcopter' research project in December 2013.

[Doctors Without Borders](#) have announced a pilot project where the use of drones is being tested in order to build drone transportation networks in world regions with limited or poor roads.

In August, the company worked with the World Health Organization to complete a pilot test in the high mountains of Bhutan.

Drones may well allow developing nations to 'leapfrog' in transportation and shipping, just as they have in the realm of communications, where the rise of cheaper mobile devices minimized the need to build expensive landline infrastructure.

Depersonalising the use of force

Additionally, armed drones are being used on the battlefield as well as in the domestic law enforcement. But their use, however, may come with serious downsides. The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns, has raised concern about this increasing use of technologies that depersonalise the use of force.

'The situation becomes even more problematic when the police use increasingly autonomous weapons – that is, weapons that have on board computers which decide on the use of force,' Heyns stated.

Right to life

According to the independent expert's [report](#), the protection of rights such as the right to life, personal security, and of human dignity weighs against the police outsourcing their work to machines, if this means the police no longer have meaningful control.

'The requirement under human rights law is not merely to distinguish between lethal and any non-lethal force. Even if it is unlikely to lead to death, the force used must still be the minimum required by the circumstances of each case,' Mr. Heyns said pointing to an increasing number of cases in which individuals have been killed or seriously injured as a result of improper use of supposedly 'less lethal' weapons.

'Questions that are asked about the use of armed drones and autonomous systems on the battlefield intensify when they are used in ordinary policing. The relationship between the State and those under its protection is very different from its relationship with those it regards as its enemies during armed conflict.'