

Drones Minute – Adopted at Business Meeting of Dec. 13, 2015

In keeping with the historic peace testimony of Friends, we, the New Brunswick Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, ask the U.S. government to immediately restrict targeted assassinations of selected individuals through the use of weaponized drones and to pursue a policy aimed at their complete abolition. Assassination as an element of U.S. policy has been prohibited by U.S. law since the administration of Gerald Ford and is clearly in violation of International Law as well. It should also be noted that targeted drone strikes have killed, by government admission, four American citizens, completely abrogating their right to due process under the Constitution. This is an extremely dangerous precedent representing a threat to just governance under the rule of law.

We support the Final Statement of the Interfaith Conference on Drone Warfare adopted January 25, 2015 in Princeton, New Jersey, by the more than 150 religious leaders attending the conference. Recommendations in the statement include: a call for an immediate halt to targeted lethal drone strikes; transparency and accountability on the past use of such strikes; repeal of the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force that has been used to justify the lethal drone program; and rescinding the authority of the CIA, Joint Special Operations Command, and any other agency or contractor to use weaponized or lethal drones.

Transparency and accountability are essential to the conduct of foreign policy in democratic societies. Factual details of “targeted killings”, “signature strikes”, and “terrorist attack disruption strikes” should be disclosed including 1) acknowledgement of the strikes conducted; 2) an accounting of victims, including civilian casualties and the impact on affected communities; 3) explanation of the official criteria for selection of persons targeted; 4) citation of the legal justification for authorization of strikes; 5) description of the methods of investigating deaths; and 6) disclosure of the standards for compensating victims. Recent studies have found widespread stress and trauma among pilots, analysts, operators, and other technicians of weaponized drones related to their unique duties. Further study is needed, and these individuals serving their country need support.

We call for the U.S. government to immediately discontinue research on the development of semi-autonomous and autonomous weapons systems, and to pursue vigorously a global ban on such weapons systems. The U.S. military is in the intermediate stages of research on computer software that would enable

machines endowed with “artificial intelligence” to perform the tasks and make decisions related to targeted killing by drones (and other weapons) that are currently undertaken by human beings. If this comes to fruition, future warfare would be even more destructive and inhumane.

Finally, we ask our leaders to take us off the path of unending and ill-defined war.