



The US policy of using aerial drones to carry out targeted killings presents a major challenge to the system of international law that has endured since the second world war, a United Nations investigator has said.

Christof Heyns, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, summary or arbitrary executions, told a conference in Geneva that President Obama's attacks in Pakistan, Yemen and elsewhere, carried out by the CIA, would encourage other states to flout long-established human rights standards.

In his strongest critique so far of drone strikes, Heyns suggested some may even constitute "war crimes". His comments come amid rising international unease over the surge in killings by remotely piloted unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

Addressing the conference, which was organised by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a second UN rapporteur, Ben Emmerson QC, who monitors counter-terrorism, announced he would be prioritising inquiries into drone strikes.

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