Summary report High-Level Event:

Safeguarding human rights in the age of artificial intelligence

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AI's potential to expand access to information and expanding the right to free expression, access to healthcare and education as well as supporting social protection systems, advancing climate action and environmental sustainability, and enabling a more inclusive, informed and meaningful participation in public and civic life, can only be realized when these systems are designed and deployed with rigorous human-rights safeguards at their foundation. Yet the same technologies are also reshaping societies in ways that place those very rights at risk—from privacy and equality to labour protections, information integrity, and the safety of women and girls and vulnerable groups. This dual reality underscores the urgent need for a human-rights-based approach to AI governance, taking into account States' obligations under international law and a holistic understanding of technology, that can both harness innovation and guard against harm.

The United Nations General Assembly launched the Global Dialogue on AI Governance and the International Scientific Panel on AI in September 2025, marking the first mechanisms for universal and inclusive global participation in AI governance. Under the Modalities Resolution (A/RES/79/325), human rights are designated as one of the Dialogue's thematic pillars and they also function as a cross-cutting concern running through every topic the resolution addresses. The first Global Dialogue is thus a critical opportunity to frame AI governance from the perspective of human rights and to build a common understanding about the canon of policy guidance developed by the UN in this domain.

This high-level event explored, in particular, how the State's duty to protect human rights applies both in the context of the State as duty bearer and economic actor, emphasizing States' obligations 1) to safeguard against adverse impacts by third parties, including impacts stemming from or linked to corporate activities including activities of technology companies, as well as 2) to promote a rights-respecting environment to realize AI opportunities. The event followed a series of consultations with companies and other stakeholders organized by OHCHR[1] aimed to offer a platform for exchange between Ambassadors and delegates, international organisations, civil society, companies and relevant experts in the Geneva ecosystem about crucial human rights aspects of AI governance as well as to inform the deliberations during the 1st Global Dialogue on AI Governance. The event was co-organized by OHCHR, ODET, and the Freedom Online Coalition, and its conclusions are submitted to the preparatory process of the Dialogue through this summary report.

[1] https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/b-tech/20260317-summary-odet-b-tech-consultation-nyo.pdf; https://www.ohchr.org/en/b-tech/artificial-intelligence

Key takeaways

1. **A call to multi-disciplinary and multi stakeholder action for a positive AI future with human rights at its core**

Participants reflected on the State's role in protecting rightsholders from risks derived from AI design and deployment, actively shaping a rights-respecting AI ecosystem as well as fostering the potential positive impact of AI on the implementation of human rights. Key overarching themes included the importance of transparency, accountability, and meaningful oversight.

Key actors, including public and private investors, legislators, regulators, responsible companies, leading academics and expert civil society voices are determined to contribute to long-term and sustainable growth that is made possible by better business models and responsible corporate and State conduct in the AI ecosystem. Several key recommendations were echoed in remarks from the floor:

a) Pooling expertise and policy resources for capacity enhancement on AI technologies by working in multi-stakeholder models with expert civil society, international organisations, affected communities, responsible investors, the private sector and State entities to pave a rights-respecting path ahead and translate their requirements for responsible AI into implications for business models and private and public AI operations.

b) Leveraging cooperation with the technical community: The technical infrastructure necessary for digital identity, data sharing, processing, interoperability, and value creation, which also underpins core needs of data and AI innovation, is constituted by a diverse set of actors and technical standard setting provides important advice in this regard.

c) Achieving regulatory interoperability by implementing a smart mix of measures of policy and regulation grounded in the international human rights frameworks and UNGPs, which encompasses procurement, financial incentives and investment in Research and Development and compute for rights-respecting AI solutions to foster responsible innovation.

d) Learning from grassroots and Global Majority experiences with AI impacts and good practices of the AI solutions that people actually need: Working with civil society and impacted communities around the globe but also hearing from business in the Global Majority about their real-life challenges and ideas for less resource intense and targeted AI solutions brings more variety into the contemporary AI discourse

It will take a concerted and collective effort to bundle these forces to push towards a responsible and innovative trajectory that makes AI work for everyone.

2. A positive vision for a human rights-based approach to AI governance

AI governance is not merely a technical issue, but a question of power, dignity, trust and the kind of societies we want to build. Participants remarked that at present, there is false dichotomy between innovation and regulation. Clear guardrails grounded in international human rights law are essential for trustworthy and sustainable innovation, fostering safer and more trustworthy AI products and services. AI systems must be designed with human rights at their core from the outset, rather than treating safeguards as an afterthought. Beyond needed guardrails, human rights in the age of AI are not only about preventing harms, but also about ensuring equitable access to technology. Access to connectivity, computing capacity, skills, data and participation in standard-setting are essential human rights concerns, especially as developing countries remain largely absent from high-performance AI infrastructure and billions of people remain offline. While AI can bring significant benefits in areas such as healthcare, education, disaster resilience and climate action, it may also reproduce inequalities, including through biased data, models and deployment. These risks can affect rights such as equality, dignity, privacy, freedom of expression, access to information and participation. The measure of success is how AI affects the most vulnerable, while ensuring that the benefits of AI are shared equitably.

The State-business nexus in AI governance is crucial to achieve a positive vision of human rights-based AI governance. States are not only regulators, but also procurers, financiers and users of AI systems. They should use a "smart mix of measures" (UNGPs 4-6) of legislation, public procurement, infrastructure investment, capacity-building and financial incentives to promote rights-respecting AI. At the same time, companies should conduct human rights due diligence throughout their operations and relationships with State actors, guided by the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) and OHCHR's B-Tech resources. Technical standards are also a valuable tool for translating human rights principles into concrete design choices, safeguards and deployment practices.

Investors, both public and private, play a key role in incentivizing an AI economy that puts human rights at their center.

To foster a positive vision for AI governance rooted in human rights, it takes a collective effort grounded in inclusive and multi-stakeholder governance involving affected communities, women, youth, civil society, technical experts, companies, investors and States. The central message emerging from the opening plenary was that a rights-respecting AI future is possible if human rights are treated as the foundation of AI governance, innovation and economic development, and bridges are built between technical and human rights terminologies and methodologies.

3. Implications for a "smart mix" of mandatory and incentive-based measures to require companies to respect human rights and additional steps States should take such that human rights are protected in the "State-Business nexus" (UNGPs 4-6).

In line with international law, the UNGPs reaffirm the State duty to protect which extends to the development, deployment and use of AI technologies by companies as well as conceptualize the economic nexus between States and the private sector. For companies, they introduce the

concept of the corporate responsibility to respect, which applies to the activities of technology companies, including activities relating to artificial intelligence (A/HRC/59/32)[2].

The Guiding Principles introduce the concept of a "smart mix" of mandatory and incentive-based measures to require companies to respect human rights. That approach is aimed at achieving policy coherence across national, regional and international frameworks, aligning expectations for corporate conduct.

Where there is a close connection between the State and business actors, States should take additional steps to ensure that human rights are protected. Known as the "State-Business nexus" (UNGPs 4-6), this aspect of the UNGPs covers a range of policy areas, including the management of State-owned enterprises, financial and other support provided by States to companies, the privatization of services that may impact human rights enjoyment, development finance, industry policy and public procurement.

The UNGPs set out a principled approach for all companies to identify risks to people and take action to prevent or mitigate them. This applies to companies needing to make efforts to anticipate and mitigate harms that might occur related to the use of their AI products and services, including regarding business relationships with State actors (UNGPs 13).

During the discussion, various States stressed that the core question in digital and AI governance is how to make human rights principles operational in practice, recalling the respective roles of States and businesses: States have the duty to protect human rights, while private actors have the responsibility to respect them[3]. Governments should assess how AI may affect human rights through tools such as human rights impact assessments and human rights due diligence, which can support more informed and responsible decision-making. It further underlined that such assessments should be concrete, practical and embedded in governance processes, rather than treated as abstract principles. The importance of inclusive governance, involving governments, businesses, civil society, academia and other relevant stakeholders, was also highlighted. Referring to Human Rights Council resolution 59/11 on new and emerging digital technologies and human rights, human rights should not remain at the margins of digital governance, but should be placed at its very centre.

Guidance emerging from the UN System

The UN Human Rights Council, OHCHR, the treaty bodies, special procedures and additional UN mechanisms based in Geneva have developed an important body of policy and research which can provide a basis for the thematic discussions taking place within the first Global Dialogue on AI Governance. Last year, the Freedom Online Coalition published a joint statement on AI and human rights[4] presenting key challenges and opportunities of AI in a human rights-respecting

[2] https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4086837/files/A_HRC_59_32-EN.pdf
[3] https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/resources/government-interventions-in-ai/
[4] https://freedomonlinecoalition.com/joint-statement-on-ai-and-human-rights-2025/

manner, and calling on all Member States, institutions, and technology actors to work constructively together towards concrete actions.

The UNGPs have been taken up by numerous UN organizations to inform or structure their work in the field of AI, including through guidance emerging from the OHCHR B-Tech Project. In addition, the mapping conducted by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2024 to stock take and collect the primary corpus of guidance on technology and human rights within the UN ecosystem will be served as a starting point. The discussion built on the HRC report regarding the practical application of the UNGPs to the activities of technology companies, including activities relating to AI, and its relevance to the implementation of Objective 3 of the Global Digital Compact. It also referenced the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights report (A/HRC/59/53) on procurement and deployment of AI systems by States and businesses in alignment with the UNGPs.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) emphasized that its 2021 Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence[5] is grounded in human rights, human dignity and fundamental freedoms. It stressed that while AI must be safe, secure and trustworthy, these conditions are not sufficient: AI must also be inclusive, non-discriminatory and compliant with human rights. UNESCO also highlighted the importance of engaging the private sector, noting that ethical AI is not only a human rights imperative but also "good business," as inclusive and non-discriminatory systems are more trustworthy and effective. It concluded that, as AI continues to evolve, the international community should agree on clear limits for what AI should not do, while enabling AI to help address global challenges.

With regard to **labour**, the recently adopted 2026 International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Decent Work in the Platform Economy[6] calls for AI governance to be anchored in decent work, labor rights and social justice reflected and is a concrete example of how human rights and labor rights principles can be translated into practical governance measures for AI-enabled workplaces, particularly where algorithmic management and automated decision-making are used. AI can support productivity, workplace safety and access to services, but these benefits are not automatic. A human-rights based approach requires investment in skills, reskilling, lifelong learning and AI literacy, with particular attention to workers, Micro, Small, and Medium-sized Enterprises. Human rights due diligence in AI must explicitly include labor rights. This includes assessing risks related to discrimination in recruitment and promotion, worker surveillance, algorithmic management, occupational safety and health, psychosocial harms, working conditions, and labor issues across AI value chains, including data annotation and content moderation. Here, social dialogue is as an essential part of the "smart mix" of AI governance.

Turning to **children**, while AI has significant potential to advance children's rights in areas such as education and healthcare, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) warned that the harms are already real, including the creation of sexually explicit deepfakes of children, risks from AI companions, and broader impacts on how children think, learn and relate to others.[7] Some

[5] https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/recommendation-ethics-artificial-intelligence

[6] https://www.ilo.org/resource/record-decisions/convention-concerning-decent-work-platform-economy-2026

[7] Guidance on AI and children (version 3.0): Recommendations for AI policies and systems that uphold child rights (2025); Child rights and responsible technology: Key UNICEF resources for businesses (2026);When AI becomes a friend: Child rights risks.

convergence on observed responses is beginning to emerge across elements, , including risk assessments, disclosure that a system is not human, and the facilitation of user reporting. But these are unevenly applied – too often child protection depends on where children live and which service they use. A meaningful, robust response therefore means establishing a minimum regulatory baseline for AI systems affecting children, including more rigorous mandatory escalation and referral safeguards for chatbots that are capable of companion-like interactions.

AI is intensifying **technology-facilitated gender-based violence** (TFGBV), with women and girls disproportionately affected, particularly through sexualized deepfakes, image-based abuse and AI-driven disinformation on sexual and reproductive health. In response, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) outlined its support for future-proof and rights-based regulatory frameworks that hold platforms accountable, such as the UNFPA/Derechos Digitales Guiding Principles for TFGBV Rights Based Law Reform, alongside a joint UNFPA/UN Women consolidated resource to be released later this year8

With regard to **health**, the World Health Organization (WHO) emphasized that AI has strong potential to advance global health, particularly in contexts facing severe shortages of healthcare workers and specialists. However, such tools may either strengthen health systems or deepen existing problems, depending on whether they are governed in a rights-respecting and accountable manner. Several key considerations for AI governance in health have been identified. First, countries need readiness assessments and regulatory capacity to ensure that AI tools are deployed safely and effectively. Second, governance approaches should be replicable across countries to avoid each government developing frameworks from scratch. Third, localization is essential: without local ownership, capacity and contextual adaptation, AI health solutions cannot be sustainable or effective. Here, the human rights framework should not be treated as an optional add-on, but as a mandatory foundation for AI governance in health. Rights must be built into the design, deployment and oversight of AI systems in a specialized way in light of the extremely sensitive nature of health-related data. This requires not only principles and dialogue, but also concrete investment, accountability mechanisms and meaningful engagement with health workers, affected communities and other stakeholders.

Accounting for needs and perspectives from the Global South - inclusion as a governance imperative

AI is being deployed rapidly across the Global South, often faster than regulatory and enforcement systems can respond. In Global South contexts, where institutional capacity, enforcement skills

harms, and regulatory responses to AI chatbots and companions (2026); AI governance in motion: A rapid global review of AI regulation and its implications for children's rights (2025)OHCHR guidelines on getting-childrens-safety-online-right.pdf

[8] UNFPA global programme to address TFGBV - Making All Spaces Safe; UNFPA 2021 issue paper that was the first UN document to sound the alarm bell on the issue of TFGBV; Guiding principles for law and policy reform to address TFGBV; Guidance on the Safe and Ethical Use of TFGBV and Harmful Practices; Safety Showcase.

and resources remain limited, more emphasis must be given to the effective implementation of regulations.

Several human rights risks arising from AI deployment in Africa were mentioned, including impacts on workers' rights, particularly for AI data workers and content moderators in Kenya and other Global South contexts. It was noted that African countries are engaging with AI governance in different ways: some jurisdictions are actively developing regulatory frameworks, while others are more focused on attracting and deploying AI technologies. AI governance approaches in the Global South need to be rooted in the regions and respond to local needs, instead of importing approaches from other regions.

Concerns were also raised about AI procurement in the Global South, including Africa. It was noted that AI and digital tools are sometimes introduced through donations or external partnerships, which may bypass ordinary procurement safeguards and create long-term dependency or vendor lock-in. This makes public procurement an important governance entry point for ensuring transparency, accountability and respect for human rights. Finally, stronger support for Global Majority civil society and local expertise in AI governance debates were called for. It was stressed that many Global Majority civil society actors lack the funding and institutional support needed to participate meaningfully in global AI discussions. Greater investment is therefore needed to amplify voices from across Africa and ensure that AI governance reflects the realities and priorities of affected communities.

A multi-stakeholder approach

The need for meaningful multistakeholder participation was a recurring procedural theme. Panelists agreed that an impactful implementation of the "smart mix of measures" needs to be centered on **inclusive multistakeholder participation** in global AI governance. The panel highlighted efforts to bring Global South and "Global Majority" voices into AI governance debates, including through collaboration with civil society and academic partners. Coalitions such as MAP-AI are working towards such goals[9]. The panel further argued that the Global Dialogue on AI Governance should center human rights, ensure inclusive participation, reflect regional priorities and build coherence across UN, regional and national AI governance processes.

4. Key asks for embedding human rights in the AI ecosystem at the nexus of State and business: Good practices and challenges in advancing human rights AI development and deployment in the public and private sector.

States need to ensure that they have the necessary policy coherence, as well as capacity and ability, to effectively protect people against harms involving AI. The need for policy coherence extends to States participating in multilateral fora and multi-stakeholder processes which are essential tools in ensuring the international legitimacy, coherence and effectiveness of State action.

[9] https://globalnetworkinitiative.org/map-ai/

States should seek to establish a coherent policy framework, reinforced by political leadership, that ensures human rights commitments are at the heart of how the States engage with and use a diverse range of AI technologies. This includes mapping which agencies are, or can, influence different parts of the technology industry as well as specific technologies, for example, data protection authorities, consumer protection bodies, equal opportunities commissions, public research departments, and multiple parts of government procuring AI. An additional effort can center on building internal competence and capability of lawmakers, civil servants, and political leaders, such that they can navigate the societal and technical complexities of how AI technologies function, the associated risks to people, and the role (including limits) of companies in addressing these risks. Structures for continuous exchange with stakeholder groups can enable learning about practice-oriented challenges and opportunities for responsible business conduct.

At the national level, member states are beginning to promote responsible AI through guidance documents, such as Mexico's 2026 Declaration of Ethics and Best Practices for the Use and Development of Artificial Intelligence[10], as well as Mexico's Senate initiative for a Federal Law on the Ethical, Sovereign and Inclusive Development of AI[11], emphasizing a risk-based approach and human oversight. The Republic of Korea's domestic approach also reflects this policy logic to maximize the benefits of AI-driven innovation while addressing potential risks. In particular, Korea's AI Basic Act[12], which entered into force in January 2026, supports the development of the AI industry through measures related to AI research and development, AI training datasets and AI data center infrastructure, while strengthening trust and safeguards through measures related to AI ethics, transparency and safety, as well as obligations concerning high-impact AI systems.

Equally, combining responsible AI aspects with national policies on Business and Human Rights, such as National Action Plans on Business and Human Rights offers additional synergy, and such policies should also address public procurement, State-owned enterprises and human rights due diligence to shape responsible AI practices. Core priorities at the national level include mandatory requirements for human rights due diligence regarding AI products and services; using public procurement and State investment as levers for responsible AI; and strengthening international cooperation to avoid fragmented national approaches. In addition, it is important to provide for access to remedy and meaningful participation of affected communities in the design and oversight of AI systems.

At the supranational level, the EU AI Act[13] was mentioned as an example that uses a risk-based framework to protect human rights while allowing innovation, banning unacceptable-risk systems such as social scoring, biometric categorization, manipulative AI exploiting user vulnerabilities, and emotion-inference tools in workplaces or schools. High-risk systems face strict obligations placed mainly on providers, ensuring governments hold businesses, not users, accountable.

[10] https://secihti.mx/sala-de-prensa/presentan-declaracion-de-etica-y-buenas-practicas-para-el-uso-y-desarrollo-de-la-ia-en-mexico-secihti-y-atdt/

[11] https://sil.gobernacion.gob.mx/Archivos/Documentos/2025/04/asun_4896460_20250430_1747757009.pdf

[12] A New Chapter in the Age of AI: Basic Act on AI Passed at ...과학기술정보통신부 https://www.msit.go.kr › eng › bbs › view

[13] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj/eng

Lower-risk systems must meet transparency rules, such as informing people when they interact with AI tools or deepfakes. To implement the Act, EU member states must establish supervisory authorities.

At the international level, State efforts need to recognize that access to, and use of, digital technologies can spread at a speed, scale and depth across borders. This will require large levels of cooperation among States and multilateral efforts might minimize the risks of States pursuing their own, however legitimate - economic and geo-political interests at the expense of building dignity and respect into the heart of the AI economy. The meaningful involvement of civil society and affected groups, as well investors, academics and business leaders, can reinforce accountability for States to prioritize human rights protections, while critically enabling effective ways to address human rights risks associated with AI to be found and implemented. OHCHR's crucial role as the authoritative voice in clarifying and promoting the application of human rights standards across the AI ecosystem was emphasized by several panelists.

In this regard, some Member States called for a clearer framework under international law addressing the profound issues from legal, ethical, humanitarian, and security perspectives of AI, including some voices also seeking to tackle the deployment of AI in the military domain, particularly given that a clear distinction between civilian and military AI is increasingly difficult to maintain.

Industry Perspectives on emerging good practice

A private-sector actor outlined its approach to embedding human rights protections across the AI lifecycle, including an internal governance structure built on responsible-AI standards, transparency reporting, and human-rights due-diligence processes. In their view, due diligence must extend from development through to deployment, meaning how AI is used by customers.

Three recommendations could strengthen global AI governance: first, greater regulatory interoperability, to reduce the current fragmentation of AI rules across jurisdictions. International human rights law should serve as a shared baseline of regulation, across borders. In addition, States should exercise leadership by modeling rights-respecting AI, not only through regulation but also through their own procurement and use of AI systems. Third, capacity building is needed for smaller companies and actors in the Global South currently facing barriers to implementing due diligence, requiring broader support to ensure equitable, universal adoption of human-rights-based AI governance.

A second private-sector actor argued that putting users first reduces the need for regulation. The company's governance philosophy centers on privacy, transparency, and user control. Company policies prohibit the exploitation of user data, or accessing users' encrypted content. The company pursued a subscription model, rather than surveillance-based monetization. Its organizational structure is designed to safeguard independence and minimize exposure to external security demands. In its AI design approach, the company prioritizes transparency, user agency, and

critical engagement. Instead of encouraging passive acceptance of AI outputs, it aims to build systems that help users think, question, and understand. The system is designed to push back when appropriate, reflecting a commitment to AI that serves users rather than exploits them.

The role of technical standards in bridging human rights and technical communities

Technical standards actively shape how digital technologies uphold rights such as privacy, dignity, equality and non-discrimination. By translating broad principles into concrete technical requirements and standard-setting processes, human rights become embedded into ICT and AI products. More systematic, practical and consistent integration of human rights across the standardization process can be achieved through cooperation between standards bodies, governments, international organizations, civil society and the technical community. Recent progress is visible in the ITU's resolutions on trustworthy AI and metaverse standards[14];the Freedom Online Coalition's call for rights-based standard-setting[15];

and the IEC/ISO/ITU Seoul Statement[16].

The upcoming Global Dialogue on AI Governance is a critical opportunity to place human rights at the centre of AI governance. The rich body of guidance developed by the UN human rights ecosystem, including OHCHR, the Human Rights Council, treaty bodies, special procedures and other UN mechanisms, serves as a foundation for rights-based AI governance. The Global Dialogue on AI Governance represents an important opportunity to strengthen cooperation, build trust and develop a shared understanding of how international law applies to AI. It is a key milestone in shaping how AI can not only drive innovation and prosperity, but also protect human dignity, democratic values, freedom and resilient societies.

[14] https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-t/opb/res/T-RES-T.105-2024-PDF-E.pdf

[15] https://freedomonlinecoalition.com/joint-statement-technical-standards-and-human-rights-in-the-context-of-digital-technologies/

[16] https://www.iec.ch/basecamp/seoul-statement