Event Summary

Roundtable: "What role for the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in AI Governance?"

24 November 2025, Palais Wilson, Geneva

Hosted by the UN Human Rights B-Tech Project and the UN Office for Digital and Emerging Technologies (ODET)

Side event of the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights 2025

(Held under the Chatham House Rule)

AI is reshaping societies in ways that raise urgent human rights concerns, from privacy and equality to labour, information integrity, and environmental impacts. As States and companies move to implement the Global Digital Compact (GDC), this roundtable explored how the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) can guide responsible AI practices and governance and inform the implementation of Objective 3 of the GDC.

This roundtable brought together Member States, technology companies, civil society organizations and relevant experts to share good practices of companies in addressing and mitigating human rights risks derived from AI deployment. A specific emphasis was placed on development and deployment of AI in a rights-respecting manner, including through the application of human rights due diligence and impact assessments throughout the technology life cycle. The discussion built on HRC 59/32 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.

Key Trends and Risks

An academic expert outlined the rapidly evolving AI developments, including advances in generative AI and the growing autonomy of AI systems, diverging regulatory trajectories across jurisdictions and contemporary infrastructure constraints (energy, compute, data centres). Geopolitical shifts in model development, including new actors and changing assumptions about scale, will determine the future trajectories such as embodied AI and AI-assisted scientific discovery. These trends highlighted the need for early integration of human rights safeguards and robust international cooperation to guide AI development and deployment.

State Perspectives

Representatives from the **Republic of Korea** and the **Czech Republic** emphasized:

- The UNGPs as a foundation for embedding human rights into AI governance
- The need for transparency, accountability, and HRDD across the AI lifecycle
- The importance of breaking silos between technical, policy, and human rights communities

States also acknowledged the difficulty of balancing innovation with effective protection against AI-related harms.

Corporate Practices

Technology companies shared approaches to aligning AI development and use with the UNGPs. Key themes included:

- Governance structures and policies for reviewing AI systems
- Human rights impact assessments tailored to AI risks
- Transparency efforts, including documentation and testing frameworks throughout the product lifecycle
- External expert stakeholder engagement
- Safety and content moderation tools supported by AI, with continued reliance on human oversight
- Safeguards and rights-based design approaches, including internal checklists and risk evaluation datasets

Companies described the UNGPs as a practical framework. However, they called for clearer operational guidance and examples.

Global Majority insights on human rights concerns related to AI from civil society

Civil society representatives from Asia, Africa, and Latin America highlighted human rights impacts already visible on the ground, including but not limited to:

- Labour concerns in outsourced AI supply chains, including low pay, harmful content exposure, and limited access to remedy,
- Environmental impacts from the growing resource demands of AI infrastructure,

- Linguistic and digital inequities, where low-resource language communities face higher content moderation errors and exclusion,
- Data extraction concerns, including free or subsidised AI tools deployed in weak-regulation environments with data protection issues,
- Norm-setting opportunities, with regional bodies beginning to integrate the UNGPs into digital governance approaches such as AI regional strategies.

Speakers stressed that structural harms — inequality, discrimination, and power imbalances — must be addressed alongside immediate risks.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Participants agreed on the relevance of the UNGPs in serving as a common compass for HRDD, stakeholder engagement, and remedy in AI contexts, but that operationalization requires more practical tools, peer learning, and clarity for companies – an area where forthcoming B-Tech work could add value.

Global South participation remains limited and must be strengthened in governance, standard-setting, and corporate engagement. Also, labour, environmental and structural issues require more attention from both public and private stakeholders, meaning more international cooperation is essential to avoid fragmented AI governance ecosystems.

Looking Ahead: UN-Level Developments

ODET shared updates on two new mechanisms established within the UN, as part of the GDC implementation:

1. Independent International Scientific Panel on AI – a global expert body providing evidence-based assessments of AI trends for States; to launch in 2026.
2. Global Dialogue on AI Governance – a Member State-led process to promote exchange, interoperability, and shared principles.

Both mechanisms aim at building safer, more secure and trustworthy AI systems. They will incorporate human rights perspectives, and the voices of various stakeholders, including from the Global South.

Conclusion

The roundtable reaffirmed the relevance of the UNGPs as an anchor for rights-respecting AI governance. Participants emphasized the need for practical guidance, inclusive multi-

stakeholder processes, and cooperation aligned with the Global Digital Compact. Insights from the discussion will inform ongoing B-Tech and ODET work, including efforts to advance human rights due diligence for AI product design and to strengthen global alignment on responsible AI governance.