
10th UNAOC Global Forum, Cascais, 25-27 November 2024

Thematic Panel 7: “The soft power of AI: Applications of artificial intelligence in advancing intercultural and interfaith dialogue”

27 November 2024, 14:00–16:00, Estoril Convention Centre

Draft

The world is at the precipice of an unprecedented technological revolution, with Artificial Intelligence (AI) rapidly transforming every aspect of our lives — reshaping human interactions, catalyzing development, and unlocking potential once deemed unreachable. From education and media, to healthcare, governance, entertainment, finance, and nearly all sectors of our society, the impact of AI is both pervasive and ubiquitous, promising to accelerate humanity’s progress at unparalleled speeds.

Undeniably, AI innovations have the extraordinary potential to be a force for good. From leapfrogging the next frontier of scientific discoveries, to turbocharging education with personalized learning experiences, to improving access to medical care through advanced diagnostics, to promoting sustainable practices and propelling the Sustainable Development Goals, to becoming a vector for inclusion and fostering diversity, AI's benefits are indeed multifaceted and widespread.

More importantly, AI can be a soft power tool to build lasting peace — with its capacity to shape narratives, influence perceptions, and foster dialogue on a global scale. AI-driven translation tools, for example, help bridge language barriers, allowing people from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate effectively. Further, Generative AI and its varied iterations are revolutionizing how content is created, offering new ways to share stories that reflect diverse perspectives. Such technologies can produce media, art, and educational materials that highlight shared human experiences, fostering empathy and understanding across different communities. By enabling marginalized voices to be heard and promoting narratives that counteract biases and stereotypes, AI could also pave the way for more inclusive global conversations, ultimately promoting mutual respect across cultures and religions.

However, AI’s potential for good comes with a myriad of challenges that must be carefully navigated. In the absence of safeguards and guardrails, these innovations may inadvertently deepen social divides, reinforce biases, and exclude the very voices it should seek to uplift.

Recognizing these challenges, the United Nations has been leading the development of a governance framework to ensure responsible and ethical use of AI. The United Nations Secretary-General has consistently underscored the pressing need for a global, human-centric approach to

AI governance. He spearheaded the creation of the Global Digital Compact,¹ adopted at this year's *Summit of the Future*, which calls for leveraging digital technologies, including AI, to serve the common good while safeguarding fundamental human rights and contributing to peace, security, and sustainable development.

The Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on Artificial Intelligence² was established to ensure that AI serves humanity and fosters innovation while addressing critical risks. In its Interim Report, "Governing AI for Humanity"³, the advisory body emphasized the need for international norms that "*reflect qualities of the technology itself and its rapidly evolving uses — agile, networked, flexible — [and] empowering and inclusive, for the benefit of all humanity.*"

Further, at the "AI for Good Global Summit",⁴ convened by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in May 2024, experts explored how AI can be leveraged to address global challenges while ensuring that AI benefits all of humanity and not just a select few. In addition, UNESCO's "Recommendation on Ethics of Artificial Intelligence",⁵ adopted in 2021, represents the first global standard on AI ethics and underscores the importance of transparency and accountability in AI systems.

In the UNAOC Action Plan 2024–2026,⁶ the High Representative for UNAOC highlighted artificial intelligence as a new activity area, advocating for cultural and religious sensitivity in AI development, and focusing on the human dimension of AI to enhance intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The Plan reaffirmed UNAOC's commitment to "continuing to advocate for ethical standards, transparency guidelines, as well as safeguards and guardrails in AI governance, to ensure that AI development will emphasize human rights and contribute to more inclusive and equitable societies."

The Action Plan also highlights the significance of the "UNAOC Global Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence: Towards the World of #OneHumanity", a series launched jointly by UNAOC and Onuart Foundation in October 2022 and followed-up with a second Dialogue in October 2023. Building on its success, UNAOC will continue to organize and convene key stakeholders — including governments, international organizations, private sector leaders, academia, and civil society — to engage in meaningful discussions to "put a human face on artificial intelligence".

In this context, within the framework of its 10th Global Forum in Cascais, Portugal, UNAOC is turning the spotlight on how humanity can ensure that AI becomes a tool for peace and social cohesion rather than a mechanism that entrenches division and inequality. In this era of unprecedented change, against a backdrop of complex geopolitical tensions, the stakes are higher

¹ Pact of the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declarations on Future Generations. 2024. Available at:

<https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sof-the-pact-for-the-future.pdf>

² High level advisory body on AI. Final Report. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/ai-advisory-body>

³ Interim Report: Governing AI for humanity. 2023. Available at:

https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_ai_advisory_body_governing_ai_for_humanity_interim_report.pdf

⁴ Artificial Intelligence for good Summit. Available at: <https://aiforgood.itu.int/summit24/>

⁵ Recommendations on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000381137>

⁶ UNAOC Action Plan (2024 -2026). Available at: <https://www.unaoc.org/resource/unaoc-action-plan-2024-2026/>

now more than ever. By bringing together diverse voices from diverse sectors, this discussion aims to explore the immense soft power of AI to advance intercultural and interfaith dialogue, tackle the ethical and governance challenges necessary to prevent the inadvertent proliferation of biases and stereotypes, and facilitate meaningful conversations among and across communities.

The speakers will address the following guiding questions:

- How can AI be used to bridge cultural and religious divides? What applications currently exist in this sphere and what is their impact globally?
- How can AI help overcome language, cultural and religious barriers and foster better communication between diverse communities?
- What key ethical considerations must be addressed in the development of AI applications? How can we effectively safeguard against reinforcing biases and stereotypes embedded in training data?
- How do we ensure that AI technologies are accessible and beneficial to all communities, particularly in developing countries?
- What role do you see for traditional forms of media and communications in the age of AI, and how can they be integrated with AI-driven approaches?
- How can civil society collaborate with tech companies and governments to ensure that AI initiatives are inclusive and community-driven?