

## Multilateral AI Diplomacy: Setting the Stage for Success in 2026

United Nations Foundation NY Office, 320 E 43<sup>rd</sup> Street

5 February 2026 // 8:30 am–10:30 am ET

### Summary

The meeting convened Permanent Representatives, senior diplomats, UN officials, experts, industry representatives, and civil society actors to reflect on the year ahead for multilateral AI diplomacy.

Discussions focused on the two newly established and interlinked mechanisms: the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and the Global Dialogue on AI Governance. The objective of the conversation was to assess how these mechanisms can be deployed effectively, inclusively, and credibly to support international cooperation on AI at a moment of rapid technological change and geopolitical uncertainty.

Participants emphasized that AI is no longer a niche technological issue but a cross-cutting force shaping economies, security, human rights, development trajectories, and governance systems worldwide. As such, it was widely agreed that the United Nations, by virtue of its universality and legitimacy, has a unique responsibility to provide an inclusive forum for dialogue and a shared evidence base to guide collective action.

### Framing the Conversation

Full opening remarks from the co-hosts can be found here:

- [H.E. Ambassador Ekitela Lokaale, Permanent Representative of Kenya to the UN](#)
- [H.E. Ambassador Jihoon Cha, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to the UN](#)



Republic of Kenya



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea  
to the United Nations



United Kingdom  
Mission to the  
United Nations



- [H.E. Ambassador Archie Young, Interim Deputy Permanent Representative of the UK to the UN](#)

The discussion emphasized the UN's unique convening role as the only forum where all countries have an equal seat to address AI's global opportunities and risks.

AI was framed as a systemic, cross-cutting transformation, affecting:

- Economic productivity and labor markets.
- National and international security.
- Human rights, governance, and social cohesion.
- Daily life, including education, work, and leisure.

Speakers underscored that AI governance must balance:

- Innovation and opportunity with risk mitigation and safety.
- Sovereign policy approaches with multilateral cooperation.

The launch of the scientific panel and dialogue was described as a major diplomatic achievement, following complex negotiations under the Global Digital Compact. A recurring theme was that process design will determine legitimacy, credibility, and long-term impact.

Speakers highlighted the importance of:

- Human-centered and human-rights-based AI governance.
- Inclusivity across regions, especially for developing countries.
- Coherence with existing UN processes and external initiatives (e.g. WSIS+20 and regional AI forums).

## Panel 1: the International Scientific Panel on AI

### Purpose and Role

- The scientific panel is intended to provide a shared, evidence-based foundation to inform political dialogue and policy decisions.
- It was repeatedly emphasized that the panel's value lies not in prescribing policy, but in clarifying risks, opportunities, and trade-offs, and translating complex technical knowledge into policy-relevant insights.

### Key Ingredients for Success



Republic of Kenya



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea  
to the United Nations



United Kingdom  
Mission to the  
United Nations



- **Independence:** Scientific credibility depends on insulation from political and commercial pressures. Clear governance rules are needed on authorship, review, and decision-making authority.
- **Inclusivity and representation:** Geographic balance was highlighted as essential, with particular importance placed on Global South participation. Nearly half of the panel's membership originates from developing regions, seen as a positive signal.
- **Technical rigor and transparency:** Peer review, transparency of sources, and clarity about uncertainty were identified as core requirements.
- **Translation into policy-relevant language:** Policymakers require clear prioritization, not exhaustive technical detail. The panel must communicate uncertainty without paralysis or alarmism.

## Managing Uncertainty and Disagreement

- AI is characterized by rapid technological change and limited understanding of long-term impacts, even among developers.
- Risks identified in panel reporting include under-claiming (paralysis due to uncertainty) and over-claiming (false certainty or narrow perspectives).
- Best practice highlighted included making disagreements explicit, explaining underlying assumptions behind divergent expert views, and grounding conclusions in the best available evidence while acknowledging limits.

## Global Equity Considerations

- AI could contribute an estimated USD 15.7 trillion to the global economy by 2030.
- Only around 2% of global AI research currently originates in Africa, highlighting structural imbalance.
- Concerns were raised about AI reinforcing global inequalities if access to compute, data, and skills remains concentrated.
- There is a need for context-sensitive models (e.g. AI systems trained in the Global North performing poorly in different ecological and social contexts).

## Operational Lessons from Other Scientific Panels

- Effective panels rely on a small and empowered core writing team, broad but structured expert input, and clear processes for handling comments and revisions.



Republic of Kenya



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea  
to the United Nations



United Kingdom  
Mission to the  
United Nations



- Visibility and outreach were emphasized as essential to build trust and buy-in beyond expert circles.

## Panel 2: Priorities for the Global Dialogue on AI Governance

Participants agreed the agenda must be selective and phased, given the breadth of AI governance challenges. Key priority areas identified:

### Trust, Safety, and Accountability

- Trust was framed as an enabler of adoption, not a constraint on innovation.
- Lack of shared definitions of “harm”, safety thresholds, and evaluation methods remains a major gap.
- Calls for more standardized approaches to safety evaluations and greater accountability from major AI platforms.

### Development and Inclusion

- Governance frameworks must be usable across vastly different capacity contexts.
- Risks identified included overly complex compliance regimes excluding SMEs and startups, and linguistic, cultural, and data bias marginalizing the Global Majority.
- There was a strong emphasis on capacity building, financing, skills development, access to data, and access to compute infrastructure.

### Fragmentation and Interoperability

- Countries face a growing patchwork of national AI laws, regional frameworks, and sectoral standards.
- Interoperability and mutual recognition were highlighted as essential to reducing compliance burdens, enabling cross-border innovation, and avoiding regulatory lock-in for developing countries.

### Standards as an Underutilized Lever

- Technical standards developed by international bodies were identified as a “hidden power” in AI governance.



Republic of Kenya



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea  
to the United Nations



United Kingdom  
Mission to the  
United Nations



- Greater alignment between political principles, scientific evidence, and technical standards were encouraged.

## Power Concentration and Infrastructure

- AI was described as a third pillar of global power, alongside military and economic strength.
- Compute capacity and infrastructure increasingly shape geopolitical influence.
- The UN was seen as a unique forum to explore shared infrastructure models and collective approaches that no single country could achieve alone.

## The Intergovernmental Process

### Mandate and Expectations

- The Global Dialogue and Scientific Panel were presented as complementary instruments under the Global Digital Compact.
- The dialogue is not expected to deliver final answers immediately, but to build shared understanding, establish credibility and trust, and create a durable cooperative process.

### Member State Feedback

- Strong engagement noted, with over 40 countries participating in early consultations.
- Consistent messages from governments included the need for practicality and relevance, a strong development orientation, and for multi-stakeholder inclusion to be a core feature, not an add-on.
- Governments emphasized they do not want to choose between innovation and safety and between development and human rights.

### Process Design

- There were clear calls for transparent timelines, predictable consultation cycles, and hybrid formats enabling participation from capitals.
- There were strong cautions against duplication with existing forums and mandate drift.
- The Co-Chairs are committed to presenting a clear roadmap outlining milestones, roles, expected outputs, and deliverables



Republic of Kenya



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea  
to the United Nations



United Kingdom  
Mission to the  
United Nations



- Credibility of the dialogue was linked to the ability to point to concrete outcomes, even if incremental.
- The Co-Chairs emphasized the importance of innovation in format, avoiding purely speech-based plenaries.

## Closing Remarks

- The discussion reaffirmed that AI governance must be pursued alongside AI capacity-building, not in isolation.
- The most significant future divide was identified as the gap between countries with the capacity to shape and deploy AI and those limited to consuming technologies developed elsewhere.
- Emphasis was placed on diplomatic capacity-building, inclusive participation grounded in evidence, and leveraging the scientific panel to anchor political discussions in facts.
- The event was framed as a rehearsal for 21st-century digital diplomacy, requiring humility in the face of uncertainty, a strong commitment to multilateralism, and practical cooperation across governments, industry, academia, and civil society.
- Participants were encouraged to remain actively engaged in shaping both the dialogue and the supporting scientific work to ensure AI governance delivers equitable and global benefits.



Republic of Kenya



Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea  
to the United Nations



United Kingdom  
Mission to the  
United Nations

