

Opening Statement at ECOSOC Special Meeting on Artificial Intelligence (6 May 2025)

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor to address this ECOSOC Special Meeting on Artificial Intelligence.

We meet this afternoon with a simple but urgent purpose: to discuss whether the age of artificial intelligence will widen divides or widen opportunity.

Hardly a month passes without artificial intelligence rewriting what is possible.

Just three weeks ago, clinicians in [Benin field-tested a mobile ultrasound](#) system whose on-device AI diagnosed tuberculosis with a 93% sensitivity—surpassing human experts and needing no laboratory.

That single milestone shows both the promise and the puzzle before us: AI can move life-saving expertise to the last mile, yet making such breakthroughs routine will demand governance, financing, and capacity that many nations still lack.

The evidence before us presents both promise and peril.

While AI offers extraordinary potential to advance the Sustainable Development Goals, 80% of global computing infrastructure remains concentrated in North America, Europe, and China.

Meanwhile, 118 countries—many in the Global South—remain largely absent from governance discussions that will shape our shared digital future.

This imbalance is not merely a technological divide—it represents a fundamental challenge to our vision of inclusive multilateralism.

For AI to truly serve humanity, its development and governance must reflect all of humanity.

The past year has shown genuine progress toward this vision.

As you know, last September the General Assembly adopted the Global Digital Compact, the first universal agreement to place human rights, inclusion and sustainability at the heart of digital transformation.

Excellencies, the Compact moves from aspiration to action through three concrete commitments by Member States

1. Evidence first.

Member States have agreed to establish an Independent International Scientific Panel on AI so that every citizen can draw on a common, rigorous evidence base.

2. Rules that work together.

Member States will convene a Global Dialogue on AI governance to share best practices, improve interoperability of rules, and build the capacity of developing countries to design, deploy and oversee AI that advances every Sustainable Development Goal.

3. Financing that leaves no one behind.

Member States have requested the Secretary-General to craft innovative, voluntary funding options—drawing on the Advisory Body’s proposal for a Global Fund on AI—and to present them to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session.

These resources will flow to digital public goods and AI capacity-building, with special attention to the Global South.”

These pillars give us both direction and momentum. Our task is to turn them from text into tangible impact.

There is a clear emergence of leadership from the Global South.

The African Union's Continental AI Strategy, unanimously endorsed by ICT Ministers, established a structured implementation timeline with a distinctly African approach to ethical AI development.

ASEAN's Guide on AI Governance and Ethics acknowledges diverse development levels across member states while maintaining shared principles.

Latin America's coordinated approach through the Santiago Declaration created the region's first governance body for AI.

These regional frameworks demonstrate a crucial shift—from being recipients of governance models to becoming architects of inclusive approaches that balance innovation with equitable access.

Despite this progress, we must acknowledge persistent challenges. Only one in four people in low-income countries can reliably access the internet. Data quality issues persist, with current AI systems trained predominantly on English-language content from Western sources. And skills gaps show troubling patterns—with 86% of women across 52 African nations reporting lack of basic AI proficiency.

Investment patterns remain heavily skewed, with [57% of global AI funding](#) going to U.S. companies alone.

How much of AI's projected economic contribution, is expected to benefit the Global South?

We know precision agriculture applications have [increased crop yields by up to 40%](#) for smallholder farmers. Educational tools are demonstrating measurable learning improvements in communities with teacher shortages.

These innovations succeed precisely because they are developed within the contexts they serve—not simply transferred from elsewhere.

They remind us that AI solutions are most powerful when they reflect local knowledge, priorities, and values.

Distinguished delegates,

the Global Digital Compact provides us with a framework—but frameworks alone do not create change. The collective task now is to translate principles into practice through concrete commitments and coordinated action.

We need to become a catalyst for implementation on three immediate priorities:

First, catalyzing investment in both physical and digital infrastructure—particularly in least developed countries where foundational connectivity remains the primary barrier to AI adoption.

Second, establishing inclusive data governance frameworks that respect sovereignty while enabling innovation—ensuring AI systems reflect the full diversity of human experience.

Third, developing human capacity at all levels—from basic digital literacy to advanced research capabilities—with particular attention to groups currently underrepresented in the digital economy.

We can allow AI to widen divides, or we can harness it to widen opportunity.

I say, the ambition of the technology should be matched with the ambition for cooperation.

Thank you.