

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

#HRC58

24 February - 4 April 2025

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SIDE EVENT IN COORDINATION WITH THE 58TH REGULAR SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL. THE EVENT IS VIDEO RECORDED.

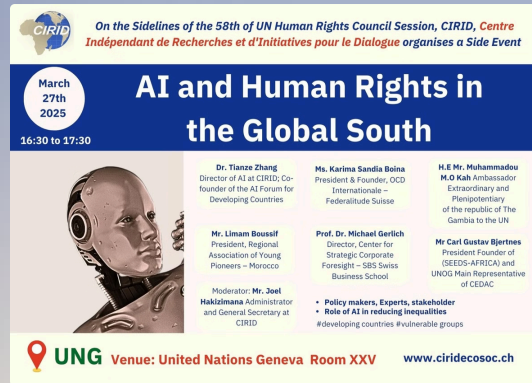
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Event Details

The side event on "Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights in the Global South" took place on Thursday 27th of March 2025, from 17:00-18:00, in Room XXV, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

This important discussion brought together experts, diplomats, and civil society representatives to address the critical intersection of artificial intelligence technologies and human rights concerns in developing nations.

Programme Overview



Moderator



JOEL HAKIZIMANA

Secretary General of CIRID

Mr. Hakizimana served as the moderator for this important side event, guiding the discussion and ensuring a productive exchange of ideas between speakers and audience members.

As Secretary General of CIRID, he has been instrumental in organizing dialogues that bridge the gap between technology, human rights, and sustainable development in the Global South.

Keynote Speaker



H.E. MR MUHAMMADOU M.O. KAH

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,
Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Gambia
to the United Nations Office in Geneva

Ambassador Kah delivered a powerful opening keynote address that set the tone for the event, emphasizing the urgent need for countries in the Global South—particularly in Africa—to take an active, strategic role in global AI and data governance.



Key Priorities from Ambassador Kah's Address



Representation and Equity

The Global South must secure a seat at the table in global AI governance platforms. The norms, ethics, and standards being developed should reflect the realities and priorities of developing nations.



Data and Digital Sovereignty

Full control over locally generated data is essential. Governments must revise policies on data governance, ownership, and cross-border data flows.



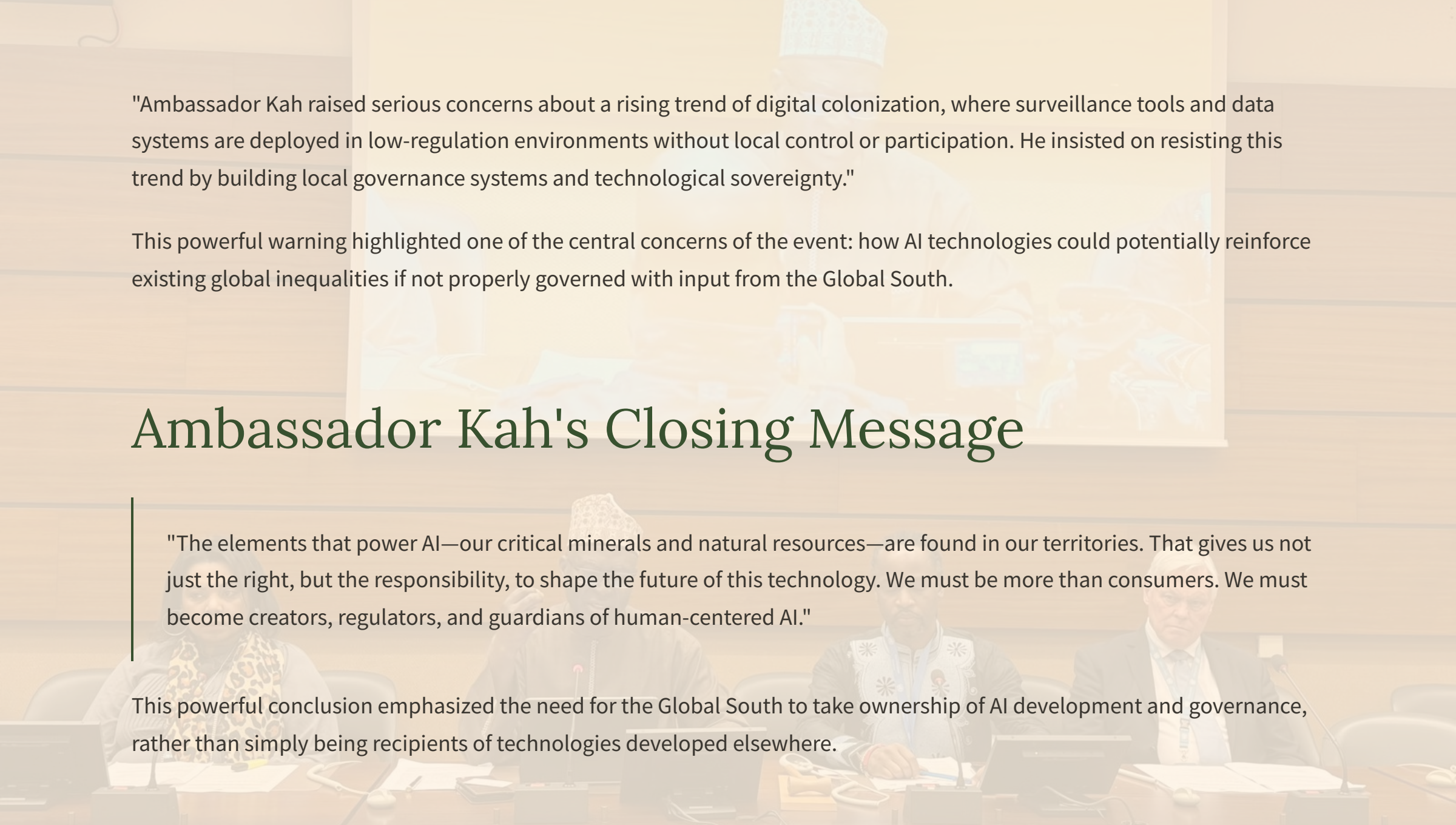
Regulation, Transparency, and Human Rights

Unregulated or poorly designed AI systems pose dangers, particularly in settings with limited regulatory capacity.



Strategic Partnerships and Co-Creation

Meaningful and reciprocal partnerships that empower the South through capacity building, knowledge transfer, and ethical cooperation are essential.



"Ambassador Kah raised serious concerns about a rising trend of digital colonization, where surveillance tools and data systems are deployed in low-regulation environments without local control or participation. He insisted on resisting this trend by building local governance systems and technological sovereignty."

This powerful warning highlighted one of the central concerns of the event: how AI technologies could potentially reinforce existing global inequalities if not properly governed with input from the Global South.

Ambassador Kah's Closing Message

"The elements that power AI—our critical minerals and natural resources—are found in our territories. That gives us not just the right, but the responsibility, to shape the future of this technology. We must be more than consumers. We must become creators, regulators, and guardians of human-centered AI."

This powerful conclusion emphasized the need for the Global South to take ownership of AI development and governance, rather than simply being recipients of technologies developed elsewhere.

Speaker: Mr. Tianze Zhang



Director of AI at CIRID | Co-founder, AI Forum for Developing Countries

Mr. Tianze Zhang, PhD Candidate at the Graduate Institute in Geneva, presented a powerful analysis of the growing technological divide between the Global North and South.

He emphasized that AI inequality is not just a technical issue but a profound human rights concern, citing alarming data on digital exclusion, lack of access to infrastructure, and AI expertise concentration.

Mr. Zhang presented concerning statistics about the widening digital divide between North and South:

92%

Computing Concentration

Percentage of high-performance computing resources concentrated in a few Northern countries

630M

Digital Exclusion

Number of people in Africa without reliable internet access

82%

AI Expertise

Percentage of world's AI researchers located in North America, Europe, and East Asia

2.8B

Global Disconnect

People remain outside the digital ecosystem entirely

These are not just inconveniences—they are systematic barriers to participation in the modern world.

Mr. Zhang emphasized that technological gaps are themselves human rights gaps. When 92% of high-performance computing resources are concentrated in a few countries, citizens elsewhere face severe limitations in their ability to participate in the digital economy.

The consequences are dire: AI systems in medical diagnostics misdiagnose Global South patients at rates 42% higher than those from the North, directly threatening the right to health for millions.

"We must recognize that technological gaps are themselves human rights gaps. The digital divide is a human rights divide."

Regulatory Maturity

Global South countries' AI regulatory maturity averages only 42% of Northern countries, yet their regulatory burden is 35% higher.

This paradox exists primarily because regulatory approaches designed for wealthy, digitally mature economies are often ill-suited to developing contexts.

Regulatory Capacity

Global South authorities average just 1.7 AI specialists per million population, compared to 8.3 in Northern countries.

The consequence? In 2024, Sub-Saharan African regions could investigate only 15% of AI-related complaints, while North American and European regions addressed 71%.

68%

Failure Rate

AI solutions directly imported from Northern countries have a 68% failure rate in Global South contexts

83%

Success Rate

Solutions developed by local teams have an 83% success rate

These statistics clearly demonstrate that both technology and governance must be adapted to local realities, not simply exported. Simply transplanting Northern regulatory models is not the solution.

Currently, while 67% of new internet users come from developing countries, 78% of digital services in these regions rely on foreign servers. This "digital dependency" undermines both sovereignty and innovation potential.

The value of data flowing from the Global South to the North was estimated at \$243 billion annually, while AI technology assistance flowing back was valued at just \$6.8 billion.

Some countries are taking promising action. Uganda and Ghana have established national data centers, while South Africa has introduced innovative "data cooperative" models.

Towards Inclusive AI Futures



Establishing data sovereignty infrastructure

Building local data centers and policies that keep data ownership within countries



Creating inclusive governance mechanisms

Ensuring diverse stakeholders have input into AI policy development



Promoting South-South cooperation

Developing partnerships between Global South nations to share resources and knowledge



Investing in local capacity building

Training local AI experts and researchers to develop contextually appropriate solutions



Developing AI that addresses local challenges

Creating solutions for specific needs in healthcare, agriculture, education, and more

Mr. Zhang's Conclusion

"The Global South does not need to—and should not—simply follow the North's AI development path. We must create our own path, one that respects our unique contexts, needs, and values."

Mr. Zhang emphasized that the international community, especially Northern countries, should provide support rather than direction, share rather than impose, collaborate rather than control. True AI equity requires abandoning digital dependency in favor of building global AI ecosystems based on mutual respect and fair cooperation.

This is not merely a technical challenge, but a fundamental question of human rights and human dignity.



Speaker: Mr. Carl-Gustav Bjertnes



Founder and President of SEEDS-AFRICA, and Main Representative of the ECOSOC-accredited NGO CEDAC.

Mr. Bjertnes presented an innovative concept for an AI Ombudsman for Human Rights, designed as a global model for governance that could help ensure AI technologies respect and protect human rights, particularly in the Global South.

His presentation focused on how this system could be implemented in Southern Morocco as a test case, with potential for broader application.

AI Ombudsman Concept Overview

The AI Ombudsman is an advanced AI system designed to monitor, report, and ensure human rights compliance across various government sectors. It analyzes data from public services, law enforcement, and social media to identify human rights issues, providing daily reports and recommendations.



This system is inspired by the Sentinel Project's Early Warning System, which successfully predicts and prevents genocides through AI monitoring.

Regional Focus

Focusing on Southern Morocco, the AI Ombudsman would address regional challenges like resource access and social inequality.

The system would integrate with local government databases, law enforcement, and civil society organizations to gather comprehensive data.

Regular public workshops and training sessions would empower communities to engage with the system effectively.

Collaborative partnerships with universities and tech companies could also support system maintenance and innovation.

Scalability and Adaptability

The AI Ombudsman concept is designed to be scalable and adaptable for diverse regional needs. It can be customized for different socio-political environments, leveraging local expertise to ensure cultural relevance.

An open-source framework could enable international collaboration, fostering best practices and shared learning.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure transparency and trust, the AI Ombudsman would adhere to strict ethical guidelines, including data privacy and non-discrimination.

An independent oversight body could be established to audit the system's operations and ensure accountability.

The AI Ombudsman represents a forward-thinking approach to integrating technology with governance, ensuring human rights are upheld in a rapidly evolving world. By proactively addressing human rights concerns and fostering community involvement, it serves as a practical model for modern governance.

Speaker: Mr. Limam Boussif



Speaking from Morocco's southern provinces, Mr. Limam Boussif, President of the Regional Association of Young Pioneers – Dakhla Oued Ed-Dahab, showcased concrete, localized applications of AI in regional economic development.

He explained how Morocco is integrating AI into strategic sectors like renewable energy, agriculture, and logistics, especially in regions like Dakhla and Laayoune. These innovations, he noted, are not only enhancing productivity and sustainability but are also empowering youth and local communities to become active agents in digital transformation.

Morocco's Strategic Embrace of AI

In recent years, Morocco has made bold, strategic moves to integrate AI into its national development strategy through investments in digital infrastructure, support for tech startups, and collaborations with international technology leaders.

These actions are positioning Morocco as a regional hub for innovation in Africa. Universities and research institutions are also playing a key role in training a new generation of AI specialists, building a foundation for a homegrown, skilled AI workforce.

"AI is no longer a distant concept—it is transforming key sectors such as industry, agriculture, energy, and healthcare. For countries like Morocco, AI represents not only a tool for innovation, but also a powerful driver of economic competitiveness and sustainable development."



Renewable Energy

Morocco is home to some of the world's largest wind and solar projects. AI is optimizing energy production and efficiency, reinforcing Morocco's leadership in sustainable energy.



Smart Agriculture and Fisheries

AI is improving crop yields and promoting sustainable fisheries, especially in coastal regions with strong economic potential.



Logistics and Trade

Thanks to their strategic geographic location, these provinces are benefiting from AI-powered logistics and transport solutions, boosting regional and international trade.

These innovations are not only enhancing productivity and sustainability but are also empowering youth and local communities to become active agents in digital transformation.

Mr. Boussif's Conclusion

"Artificial Intelligence is not just a technological trend—it is a strategic opportunity. Morocco is embracing this revolution with confidence, ensuring that innovation serves people, and that development is inclusive, sustainable, and forward-looking."

Mr. Boussif's intervention illustrated how AI can be a practical tool for territorial development when supported by strong infrastructure, policy, and education ecosystems.





Speaker: Ms. Karima Sandia Boina

President & Founder, OCD Internationale – Federalitude Suisse

Ms. Karima Sandia Boina delivered a passionate and culturally grounded intervention advocating for an AI that respects and integrates the knowledge systems of the Global South.

She reminded the audience that intelligence and predictive systems have always existed in ancestral forms—through oral traditions, environmental forecasting, and community-based knowledge.

She urged that AI in the South must not be a tool of surveillance and exclusion, but one of dignity, plurality, and sovereignty—where African, Asian, and other Southern epistemologies actively shape AI development.

Key Risks Identified by Ms. Boina

Algorithmic Bias

When AI is trained on discriminatory data, it perpetuates exclusion. Languages, traditions, and rural or informal realities from the Global South are often absent from databases, meaning that supposedly "universal" AI can actually ignore or discriminate against Southern populations.

Surveillance and Migration Control

AI is increasingly used to track, filter, and sometimes expel people, with Southern populations being primary targets. Technology becomes a tool of control rather than empowerment.

Digital Colonization

The risk of a new form of colonialism where AI systems, standards, and infrastructure are imposed from the North without consideration for local contexts, needs, or values.

Ms. Boina's Concrete Proposals

1

Develop local AI skills

This involves training, access to tools, and support for young African, Comorian, or South American researchers.

2

Impose digital sovereignty policies

Our states must decide on AI priorities for themselves, for their peoples, and not according to external agendas.

3

Foster balanced partnerships

Technology transfer should no longer be data theft or brain exploitation. It must be reciprocal and equitable.

4

Use AI for local development

In areas such as health, agriculture, or education, AI can save lives, anticipate droughts, and optimize care. But only if it responds to our realities, not imported models.

"Artificial intelligence is not neutral. It is political, cultural, geopolitical. Our collective responsibility is to seize it, not belatedly, but in advance, with our values, our vision, our solidarities. Africa, the Comoros, the Souths in general, are not on the margins. We are the memory of the world. We are also its future."

Her speech challenged the dominance of Western-centric AI and called for the revalorization of traditional intelligence. She urged that AI in the South must not be a tool of surveillance and exclusion, but one of dignity, plurality, and sovereignty—where African, Asian, and other Southern epistemologies actively shape AI development.



Speaker: Mr. Habib Ur Rehman

Central Leader, Jammu and Kashmir People's National Party

Mr. Rehman presented a compelling and urgent testimony about the misuse of AI in politically sensitive regions, focusing on Pakistani-occupied Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK).

He detailed how AI-powered surveillance, censorship, and predictive policing tools are being used to monitor, silence, and target activists, journalists, and political opponents.

Mr. Rehman began by highlighting the dual nature of AI technologies: while they have the potential to enhance governance, security, and development, they also pose serious threats to privacy, freedom of speech, and fundamental human rights.

In the Global South—where political institutions often lack transparency, and where socio-political conflicts persist—the unregulated use of AI technology can become a tool for surveillance, suppression, and manipulation.

"Many authoritarian regimes and quasi-autonomous regions have leveraged AI-driven surveillance systems, data tracking, and automated misinformation campaigns to control narratives and suppress dissent. In fragile regions such as AJK, this risk is significantly heightened due to the lack of independent oversight and the geopolitical interests of external actors."

Mr. Rehman explained that Pakistani-occupied AJK has long been a region where fundamental human rights are challenged. Reports from independent human rights organizations have documented curbs on freedom of expression, enforced disappearances, and suppression of political activists.

AI has increasingly been integrated into these mechanisms of control in several concerning ways.



Facial Recognition Systems

AI-powered facial recognition and mass surveillance systems are reportedly being used to monitor activists, journalists, and opposition voices in AJK.



Foreign Technology Collaboration

Pakistan's collaboration with foreign technology providers, including those from China, raises concerns about digital authoritarianism, where AI is used to track individuals and restrict their movements.

These surveillance technologies are being deployed without adequate oversight or transparency, creating an environment of fear and self-censorship among the population.

Censorship and Information Manipulation

Social media platforms, which could serve as a space for dissent, are being monitored through AI-driven algorithms to detect and suppress criticism of the Pakistani administration in AJK.

AI is also used in disinformation campaigns to control narratives and erase human rights abuses from public discourse.

Predictive Policing and Arbitrary Arrests

Predictive policing models powered by AI can lead to the arbitrary targeting of activists and opposition figures under the guise of national security.

AI-based forensic tools are increasingly being used to fabricate digital evidence against individuals who question Pakistani policies in AJK.

Mr. Rehman emphasized that AI's impact on human rights in AJK is part of a larger ethical dilemma facing the Global South. Many developing nations lack strong data protection laws, independent judiciary systems, and civil society organizations capable of resisting the misuse of AI.

When AI is controlled by authoritarian governments, corporations, or external powers, its ability to enhance democracy is replaced by its potential for oppression.

"Unlike wealthier nations that have begun implementing AI ethics regulations, countries in the Global South remain vulnerable to exploitative technology imports that prioritize control over individual freedoms. The absence of transparent AI governance frameworks in Pakistan and its occupied territories like AJK exacerbates these vulnerabilities."

The Way Forward: AI for Human Rights Protection



Advocacy for Digital Rights

Human rights organizations must demand greater transparency and accountability in AI deployments in AJK. The international community should pressure Pakistan to implement legal safeguards against digital authoritarianism.



Global AI Governance and Regulation

The United Nations and other global institutions must advocate for a responsible AI governance framework that prevents the misuse of AI for surveillance and censorship in politically unstable regions like AJK.



Technological Sovereignty for the Global South

Instead of relying on AI imports from powerful countries with vested interests, the Global South, including South Asia, must invest in independent AI research and ethical AI policies.



Digital Literacy and Public Awareness

Civil society in AJK and other Global South regions must be educated on digital rights and AI ethics to push back against technology-enabled human rights violations.

Mr. Rehman's Conclusion

"The AI revolution must not come at the cost of human rights. In Pakistani-occupied AJK, AI is increasingly being used as a tool of surveillance, censorship, and control, rather than empowerment. The Global South, with its rich history of resisting colonialism and oppression, must now rise to another challenge: resisting the weaponization of AI against its people."

Mr. Rehman's call was a strong appeal for international human rights frameworks to be extended to digital domains, particularly in conflict zones, and for civil society to be better equipped with digital rights awareness.



Testimony from Mr. Sherbaz Khan

Political Refugee from Kashmir

During the Q&A session, Mr. Sherbaz Khan, a political refugee from Kashmir, provided additional testimony about the dangerous ways artificial intelligence is being used in regions such as Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan, territories currently under Pakistan's control.



Surveillance Infrastructure

Facial recognition cameras are installed to monitor journalists, YouTubers, students, and activists.



Digital Monitoring

Social media accounts and mobile devices are scanned using AI systems.



Predictive Policing

AI is employed to anticipate who might protest, and individuals—often young people—are arrested before they have done anything, simply because they were flagged as a "risk."



Legal Framework

In January 2025, Pakistan enacted a new Social Media Law, granting sweeping powers to the government to block content and punish citizens for what they post online.

Mr. Khan's Call to Action

"Let us be clear: AI should never be used to silence people. It must protect human rights—not violate them."

Mr. Khan called on the international community to:

1. Monitor and address the misuse of AI in politically sensitive regions
2. Establish international norms that prevent AI from enabling repression
3. Stand in solidarity with those whose voices are being suppressed through technology

He emphasized that these technologies are often deployed without legal safeguards, without transparency, and with the support of foreign firms. Yet there are no clear laws, no oversight, and no way for people to challenge how these tools are being used against them.

As Ambassador Kah from The Gambia had stated, artificial intelligence can be a tool for empowerment, but it can also be used for exploitation. In Gilgit-Baltistan and AJK, Mr. Khan observed, we see only exploitation.

Ms. Karima Boina's Concluding Remarks

In her concluding remarks, Ms. Boina emphasized an essential truth: countries of the South are not discovering intelligence for the first time. They have been practicing it forever.

"Artificial intelligence, as it is called today, has existed for centuries in our oral practices, our community decisions, our intergenerational knowledge. Before algorithms, there were palaver trees. Before decision support systems, there was the Charter of Mandé, one of the oldest human rights texts, orally transmitted since the 13th century, based on peace, justice, dignity, solidarity."

She reminded the audience that intelligence has always been present in traditional knowledge systems, and that AI development should build upon, rather than replace, these foundations.

South Africa

Developing ethical and inclusive AI, rooted in local languages, oral traditions, and Ubuntu philosophy.

Morocco

Building technological centers of excellence integrating Amazigh knowledge, particularly in agriculture, climate, and water management.

Algeria

Investing in cybersecurity, sovereign data, and AI applications in the medical field, while drawing on a rich intellectual and spiritual heritage.

Mauritius

Becoming a dynamic digital hub where Creole languages, oral narratives, and hybrid identities nourish a multicultural AI.

These examples show that artificial intelligence should not be an imported tool or a means of subjugation, but a lever for sovereignty.

"We have the knowledge. We have the values. We have the narratives. If we start from our own logic, from our ancestral currents of thought, then we can build an AI in our image: a rooted, community-based, ethical, and fully living intelligence. What we are talking about here is not just data. It's intelligence in the service of human dignity, peoples, peace, and life."

Ms. Boina's powerful conclusion emphasized that AI development in the Global South must be grounded in local values, knowledge systems, and priorities, rather than simply importing models from elsewhere.

Ms. Boina expressed her deep appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the conference organized by CIRID, on the sidelines of the 58th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.

She thanked the organizers for creating a space for rich, sincere, and committed reflection around the essential theme: "Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights in the Countries of the South."

She particularly acknowledged His Excellency Mr. Muhammadou M.O. Kah, Ambassador of the Republic of The Gambia to Geneva, whose presence as guest of honor gave an essential diplomatic and political dimension to the exchanges.

Key Observations from the Event

Anglo-Saxon vs. Francophone Divide

African countries with Anglo-Saxon traditions appear, overall, to be more advanced than Francophone countries of the South in the integration and structuring of artificial intelligence.

Emerging Francophone Initiatives

Several Francophone countries in the South are beginning to engage in this path, initiating concrete projects, establishing frameworks for reflection, and strengthening their national capacities.

Indigenous Intelligence Systems

Artificial intelligence is not a technology foreign to the countries of the South. It already exists, in various forms, in practices, traditions of community management, and logics of adaptation.

Need for Contextual Adaptation

The challenge is to adapt AI to cultural realities, local values, customs, and fundamental needs, rather than reproducing external models.

A key conclusion from the event was that artificial intelligence can become a lever for resilience, sovereignty, and social transformation, provided it is conceived with the people, and not imposed against them.

AI can support agriculture, health, education, natural resource management, linguistic diversity, and crisis prevention. But this requires a paradigm shift: putting humans, not algorithms, at the heart of all technology.

The side event on "Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights in the Global South" highlighted both challenges and opportunities at this critical intersection of technology and human rights.

Key takeaways include the urgent need for data sovereignty, inclusive governance frameworks, and local innovation in the Global South. Speakers emphasized that AI should not be a tool of surveillance and exclusion, but one of dignity, plurality, and sovereignty.

The path forward requires balancing innovation with human rights protection, developing contextually appropriate AI solutions, and ensuring that Global South voices shape the future of AI governance.

"What we are talking about here is not just data. It's intelligence in the service of human dignity, peoples, peace, and life."



Weblinks

Recording link: **<https://ungeneva-vc.webex.com/webappng/sites/ungeneva-vc/recording/playback/0710a01ec21540869183463eeeb7ba57>**

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