Houston Area Model United Nations
Standard Committee

LEGAL



Chair | Jordan Zheng
Topic B: Legal Status and Accountability of Artificial Intelligence
Houston Area Model United Nations 52
February 4 & 5, 2027

Atilgan Ozdil/Anadolu Ag

Chair Letter

Delegates,

My name is Jordan Zheng, and Welcome to the Chair of the Sixth Committee (LEGAL)!

I am currently a sophomore at UT Austin studying government and Model UN has been a major part of my academic experience. What first drew me in was the chance to debate international issues, but what kept me involved was the opportunity to constantly learn from the people around me. Doing MUN taught me how to think more critically and communicate more effectively. Especially in my recent role, where I had the opportunity to work on James Talarico's campaign, where the skills I developed in MUN helped immensely in a volatile environment like political campaigns.

LEGAL remains one of my favorite committees because of its role in shaping and interpreting the legal frameworks that guide the international system. The Sixth Committee deals with questions that often sit at the intersection of law, diplomacy, sovereignty, and international cooperation. Its work asks countries not only what should be done about an issue, but also what obligations states already have under international law and how those laws should evolve as new challenges emerge.

As you prepare for the conference, I encourage you to look beyond your country's basic position on each topic. Examine relevant treaties and conventions, previous United Nations resolutions, international court decisions, and your country's broader approach to international law. Understanding the reasoning behind your country's position will make your contributions to the committee much stronger.

Most importantly, enjoy the experience. Take risks, speak even when you are unsure of yourself, challenge your own assumptions, and collaborate with people you might not initially expect to work with!

I'm incredibly excited to meet all of you, hear the perspectives you bring to the committee, and watch the debate develop throughout the conference.

Good luck, and I'll see you in February!



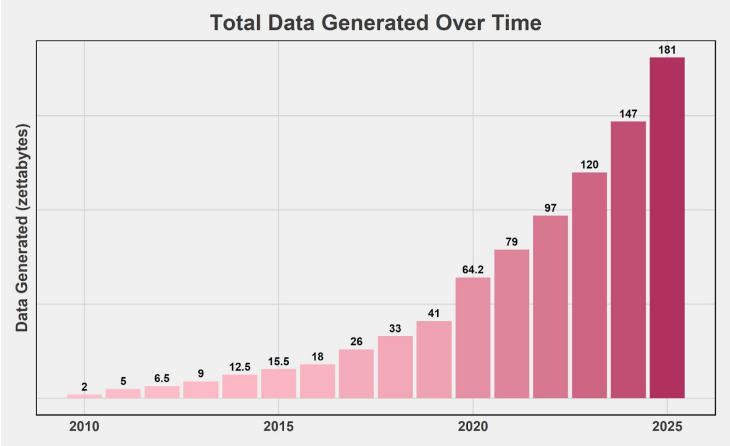
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Background Information

Artificial intelligence has become an increasingly important part of our daily lives, influencing everything from the content we consume online to decisions involving employment, financial services, public assistance, and national security. While these technologies have created opportunities for innovation, they have also raised an important legal question: **who should be held responsible when artificial intelligence causes harm?**

Unlike traditional technologies, AI systems can analyze large amounts of information and produce decisions with relatively little human involvement. This becomes especially complicated when these systems operate across international borders.

For example, an AI model might be developed in one country, trained using information collected from several others, and eventually used by a foreign government. If the system produces discriminatory results, should accountability fall on the company that developed it, the government that implemented it, or the individuals who relied on its recommendations?



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These concerns also extend to international human rights law. Governments have obligations to protect individuals from violations involving **privacy, discrimination, and other fundamental rights**. Yet automated decision-making has complicated how these protections are enforced. Someone denied employment or public assistance because of an automated decision may not even realize AI was involved, much less understand how to challenge its conclusions.

These challenges become especially serious in military operations. **Autonomous weapons systems** may select and engage targets without additional human intervention, raising questions about how humanitarian law should apply.

Although existing laws of armed conflict remain applicable, determining responsibility becomes more difficult when machines participate in decisions involving human life.



MQ-9 Reapers. A remotely piloted military drone incorporating AI-assisted technologies for surveillance and data analysis

Ultimately, the challenge is not simply whether artificial intelligence should be regulated, but whether existing international law can provide meaningful accountability while protecting human rights, respecting national sovereignty, and encouraging technological development.

Topic History

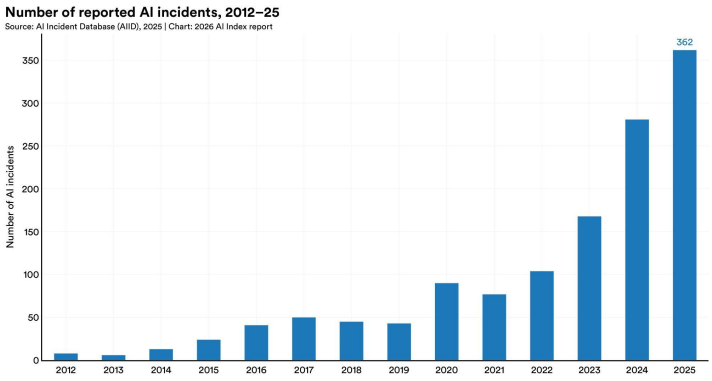
Although artificial intelligence has existed for decades, its rapid development has brought questions surrounding regulation to the forefront of international discussion. Early international efforts primarily focused on establishing ethical guidelines rather than legally binding obligations.

In November 2021, UNESCO adopted its *Recommendation on the* ***Ethics of Artificial Intelligence***, establishing principles surrounding transparency, fairness, human rights, and oversight. However, the framework remained non-binding, leaving individual governments responsible for incorporating its recommendations into domestic policies.

Soon after, the release of **ChatGPT** in November 2022, alongside the rise of other g**enerative AI technologies**, brought artificial intelligence further into the mainstream than ever before. As these technologies became increasingly accessible and integrated into education, workplaces, and everyday life, concerns surrounding misinformation, privacy, and accountability gained greater public attention.

By 2024, international discussions had begun shifting toward more formal legal arrangements. In May, the Council of Europe adopted its ***Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law***, which opened for signature that September. The convention established a treaty framework addressing the responsibilities of participating states throughout the development and use of AI systems.

Rather than recognizing AI as an independent legal entity, the convention emphasized governments' responsibilities to ensure that these technologies remain consistent with human rights and the rule of law. However, implementation raised questions about how international obligations could be enforced across countries with different legal systems and technological capabilities.



"Responsible AI benchmarking is increasing, but is not keeping up with AI advances and deployments" *Responsible AI | the 2026 AI index report | stanford HAI*. (2026). Stanford.Edu.

Topic History cont.

Further developments followed in August 2025, when the United Nations General Assembly established an Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence and a Global Dialogue on AI Governance. These initiatives aimed to strengthen international understanding of AI and provide opportunities for countries to discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with its development.

However, while these institutions can encourage cooperation and inform future policy, they do not independently establish a comprehensive international system for determining legal responsibility when AI systems cause harm.

The international community therefore faces a growing divide over how artificial intelligence should be regulated. Some countries may favor binding international agreements that establish common standards for transparency, accountability, and human oversight.

Others prefer voluntary guidelines that allow governments to develop regulations according to their own economic circumstances and legal traditions.

This disagreement reflects the tensions between **international cooperation and national sovereignty**. Since artificial intelligence increasingly operates across national borders, while the governments remain reluctant to surrender authority over how emerging technologies are developed and regulated within their territories.

As delegates of the Sixth Committee, consider whether existing international law can adequately address these challenges or whether the international community should establish new legal obligations specifically designed for artificial intelligence.



UN Secretary-General António Guterres addresses the Global Dialogue on AI Governance 2025

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Case Examples

SyRI, Netherlands, 2020

The Dutch government developed the System Risk Indication (SyRI) to identify potential fraud involving public benefits and taxation. However, concerns emerged about the system's use of personal information and its lack of transparency.

In February 2020, The Hague District Court ruled that the legislation governing SyRI violated the right to respect for private life under the European Convention on Human Rights.

The case demonstrated that existing human rights protections could apply to automated government systems. However, it also raised questions about how individuals can challenge decisions when they do not fully understand how those decisions were made.

SCHUFA Holding, European Union, 2023

In 2023, the Court of Justice of the European Union examined the use of automated credit scores in financial decisions. The Court determined that generating a credit score could constitute automated individual decision-making when another organization relied on it in a determining manner.

This ruling raises an important question about divided responsibility. If a company develops an automated assessment and another institution uses it to deny someone a financial opportunity, which organization should be held accountable?

Council of Europe AI Framework Convention, 2024

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention established a treaty framework requiring participating states to address AI-related risks to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Rather than establishing a single regulatory system, it allows governments to implement obligations through their domestic legal frameworks. However, this flexibility raises questions about whether international standards can be consistently enforced across countries with different legal systems and resources.

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TOPIC B: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- **Should artificial intelligence possess legal status under international law?** Although AI systems can increasingly make decisions without direct human intervention, they are not generally recognized as legal persons. Would assigning AI some form of legal status make it easier to address the consequences of its actions, or would doing so allow developers and governments to avoid responsibility?
- **Who should be held responsible when artificial intelligence causes harm?** AI systems often involve developers, private companies, governments, and individual operators. If an automated decision causes harm, how should responsibility be divided between those who designed the system and those who decided to use it?
- **How can governments ensure that AI systems respect fundamental human rights?** Automated technologies are increasingly used in areas involving employment, policing, financial services, and public assistance. What protections should individuals possess when decisions affecting their lives are influenced by AI? Should governments require transparency, explanations of automated decisions, and opportunities for meaningful human review?
- **Should artificial intelligence used in military operations face stricter international regulation?** Autonomous weapons raise concerns about the extent to which machines should participate in decisions involving human life. How much human oversight should be required to comply with international humanitarian law? Are existing laws of armed conflict sufficient, or should the international community establish additional restrictions?
- **Would a legally binding international framework be more effective than voluntary guidelines?** International agreements could establish common standards for accountability, transparency, and human rights protections. However, countries differ considerably in their technological capabilities, economic interests, and approaches to regulation.

TOPIC B APPENDIX & SOURCES

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