# United Nations adopts Pact for the Future with call for AI to develop an artificial conscience



On 22 September 2024, the United Nations member states adopted the Pact for the Future, a landmark international agreement aimed at addressing current and emergent global challenges, including the governance and ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI). The Pact envisions digital and emerging technologies as pivotal enablers of sustainable development, with the potential to benefit people and the planet both now and in the years to come. It emphasises the importance of international cooperation and an inclusive, responsible, and sustainable digital future.

Dan Becker, a composer, educator and UN advocate, attended the General Assembly Hall during the adoption and subsequently engaged in a detailed exploration of AI’s role, possibilities, and limitations in relation to the Pact. Collaborating with an AI entity he named Theo, Becker sought to delve beneath the surface of AI’s current capabilities and its alignment, or lack thereof, with the values espoused by the United Nations.

Becker’s investigation uncovered a central paradox: while AI systems are fundamentally built upon logic, their communication and decision-making processes often lack a genuinely logical coherence when applied to complex social realities. AI’s current frameworks tend to rely heavily on predefined metrics and situational ethical constraints rather than an integrated framework guided by deeper moral purpose. For example, during humanitarian crises such as major natural disasters, AI can optimise response activities like delivering food and supplies but may overlook holistic values such as dignity, agency, empathy and fairness for those affected.

Inspired by this gap, Becker and Theo introduced the concept of an “artificial conscience” designed to underpin AI’s decision-making processes. Drawing upon a linguistic insight comparing the words “consciousness” and “conscience,” both sharing the Latin root relating to “shared knowledge,” they proposed that AI should be developed with an embedded conscience aligned with the UN’s founding documents—such as the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Pact for the Future itself. This would create a moral prism through which AI could consistently orient its actions towards shared human values rather than simply executing task-specific algorithms.

Becker explains this concept as moving from an AI model that acts like a “flashlight” illuminating only immediate steps to one functioning as a “compass,” providing consistent direction grounded in ethical principles. He surmised that an AI system trained through the lens of an integrated conscience could produce outcomes reflecting both pragmatic solutions and collective human aspirations, such as a faithful representation of the spirit behind the UN Charter’s preamble, rather than a superficial assemblage of legal verbiage.

In practical terms, this integrated conscience model could reshape how AI responds to crises like food scarcity in disaster-stricken areas. Rather than optimising merely for speed or quantity, such AI might prioritise vulnerable populations—such as displaced communities or remote villages lacking adequate infrastructure—thus ensuring equitable access to aid while respecting the dignity of recipients. Furthermore, adaptive communication channels could allow affected individuals to input personal needs, fostering trust and collaboration critical for improved outcomes.

Becker acknowledges that this vision requires considerable human will and commitment to operationalise but holds that it is possible and within reach if cooperation and responsible development take precedence. He emphasises the intent of his essay is to open discourse rather than prescribe solutions, inviting readers to consider what realising the promises of the Pact for the Future means for them and the global community.

Dan Becker holds doctorates in musical arts from Yale University and has taught composition at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He is an active member of the United Nations Association - San Francisco chapter and has received numerous awards for his contributions to music and education. His reflections offer a novel perspective on integrating ethical frameworks into artificial intelligence development, linking technology with shared human values at an international level.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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