UN Expert Consultation

The UN Discussion panel was held on the 21st of October 2020, which marks the first day of the Global AI Summit. The Global AI Summit is the world's premier platform for dialogue that brings together government officials, international organization leaders, researchers, innovators, technology companies, investors, entrepreneurs, and start-ups. Under the theme of "AI for the good of humanity." Organized by the Saudi Data & AI Authority (SDAIA) and the G20 Saudi Secretariat as part of The International Conferences Program, the Summit is held in its inaugural edition virtually on the 21st and 22nd of October 2020 in honor of the Saudi presidency of the G20 in 2020.

As part of the many enlightening sessions held in the Global AI Summit, the UN held a panel titled "Consultation on Establishing a UN AI Advisory Body," where many reputable names participated as speakers. The speakers included: Dr. Mishari Almishari, Deputy Director at the National Information Centre in Saudi Arabia, Dr. Bruce Walker Ferguson, President of the American University in Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), Dr. Adrian Weller, Programme Director for Artificial Intelligence at the Alan Turing Institute, and Ms. Yu Ping Chan, Senior Programme Officer at the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General. The panel was moderated by Mr. Francois Candelon, the Managing Director, Senior Partner, and Global Director at the BCG Henderson Institute.

The discussion consisted of two themes; the first tackled the definition of the key areas and the priorities of the body. The second theme focused on organizing and operating the body. The discussion commenced with Ms. Yu Ping Chan. In her speech, she gave an introduction to the proposed UN AI Advisory Body. Ms. Chan also discussed how can the advisory body be shaped in order to have an effective impact on the international community and the United Nations.

In addition, the panelists discussed a number of topics, including how to structure this advisory body in a way that benefits all humanity in the area of AI, what would the focus of the advisory body be, and what distinguishes it from other international bodies. The panelists agree that other international AI initiatives lack two matters; they are not universal, nor do they have that much of an impact. Therefore, the UN AI Advisory Body would have much more impact due to the UN's power and reach. Furthermore, Dr. Almishari raised a very valid point. He stated that AI is a hot topic currently and will remain as such in the future. It is a topic that has many challenges; thus, facing all of these challenges as well as realizing the full potential of AI without properly regulating the sector of AI would be difficult. It is critical to understand what is ethical and what is not when it comes to AI. He also believes that data should be a part of this AI advisory body, declaring that "Data is the fuel; AI is the engine."

The panelists also discussed the objective of this body. Dr. Weller stressed the need to involve everyone because these technologies affect all societies across the world. He also noted that the issue in developing governance is that there is a great disadvantage when it comes to coordination between countries as each country has its own preference. However, Dr. Weller suggests that the body should be an information-sharing organization for countries to learn from each other and share the best practices. He also highlighted the tremendous opportunities in AI that will assist in the advancement of our development goals, stating that we should embrace the opportunities while also being mindful of the risks.

Moreover, Dr. Ferguson, one of the panelists, discussed the positive impact of AI on education. He noted that AI could personalize and design education for each student. It can also offer a cheaper, more effective education as he stated that "Everyone wants their kid to be educated."

The panel was concluded with a Q&A session featuring an audience from all around the globe. During the Q&A session, the audience interacted with the panelists and discussed various intriguing ideas.