Joint statement — AI as it is being developed is fuelling a global system of exploitation

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Joint letter

In an op-ed published in Le Monde, a coalition of organisations including Amnesty International and LDH (Ligue des droits de l'Homme) recommends placing human rights and environmental justice at the heart of the regulation of artificial intelligence.

As AI technologies are developing rapidly, political leaders seem in no hurry to consider the human, social and environmental issues they raise. Ignoring the warnings of civil society organisations, they prefer to view them solely through the prism of growth, productivity gains, and profit.

The potential future existential risks posed by AI are a distraction: these technologies already have very concrete impacts on the most vulnerable and discriminated populations and already undermine human rights. As they are built on biased datasets and embed the skewed worldviews of their designers, AI tools perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce social inequality and limit access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, AI systems are deployed within the discriminatory and unequal structures that exist in every society. Their uses, often against a backdrop of austerity policies, deepen inequalities in access to health, employment, public services and social benefits. The scandals that have erupted in recent years are clear evidence of this: health algorithms with sexist and racist biases, an Austrian employment service algorithm refusing to direct women towards the IT sector, profiling and discrimination against welfare beneficiaries in France, Denmark and the Netherlands.

Yet technologies are rarely the solution to fundamentally systemic problems. It would be better to address the root causes of these issues rather than risk exacerbating human rights violations with AI systems. As more decisions are entrusted to algorithms, their biases can have dramatic consequences on our lives. Predictive AI systems are increasingly used in justice and law enforcement, with the risk of amplifying systemic racism. For instance, in the United States, an AI tool used to calculate recidivism risks identified Black defendants as 'high risk' twice as often as white defendants. But even if these biases were mitigated, focusing on predictive tools distracts us from considering broader reforms to the prison system.

These systems are also used for surveillance and identification purposes in border control or conflict settings, such as Lavender, an AI tool to target terrorists that caused the deaths of thousands of Gaza civilians. Often, these technologies are developed in the Global North, like the tools created in Europe used to surveil the Uyghur population in China.

Generative AI systems are also exploited for disinformation and destabilization purposes by repressive regimes and private actors. Bots to manipulate information on health-related issues, racist disinformation during the last European elections, and audio and video deepfakes featuring electoral candidates are just some examples of how these technologies pose threats to the rule of law. AI-generated content also endangers women and children: 96% of these deepfakes are non-consensual sexual content, widely used to harm women and produce child sexual abuse material.

Moreover, these impacts are part of a global system of exploitation. AI, particularly generative AI, is an environmental disaster. By 2027, generative AI will require as much electricity as what is consumed by countries like Argentina or the Netherlands. The carbon emissions of Big Tech increased by 30 to 50% in 2024 due to the rapid development of these technologies. And the Global South is the most affected, where a proliferation of data centres and the extraction of ore like cobalt (used in batteries, for instance) harms the health of populations, pollutes water and soil, and fuels violence and armed conflicts.

Inequalities between the Global North and South are also exacerbated by technologies used for online content moderation. Digital giants allocate more resources to the Global North, favouring certain dominant languages and cultural narratives at the expense of others. Not to mention that AI systems are predominantly trained by exploited and underpaid workers from the Global South. For example, OpenAI paid Kenyan workers less than two dollars an hour to conduct the violent and taxing job of labelling toxic content.

In light of these colossal issues, the European AI Act, presented as an instrument to protect rights and freedoms, falls short, particularly on issues of surveillance and predictive policing. Moreover, this regulation will not apply beyond the borders of the European Union, even though the threats to human rights and the environment are global, and the export of surveillance AI generates profits for European companies. While European governments call for "sovereignty" in AI, the challenges posed by these systems transcend borders. Far from being merely a technological issue, AI concerns everyone. Everyone should have the ability to shape its development—or reject it if it does not align with our vision of society. True progress lies in binding frameworks, democratic developments, and approaches centering international solidarity and the most affected communities, in order to place human rights and environmental justice at the core of AI regulation.

First signatories:

Amnesty International France: Anne Savinel-Barras, president

Féministes contre le cyberharcèlement: Laure Salmona, director and co-founder

Ligue des Droits de l'Homme: Nathalie Tehio, president

Vox Public: Erika Campelo, national representative

Other signatories:

Academia Cidadã: Jonni Lopes, representative for human rights and civic space

Acceptess-T: Mimi Sarun, president

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ActionAid: Luc De Ronne, president

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Alternatives Européennes: Ségolène Pruvot, executive director

Amis de la Terre France: Marie Cohuet and Laura Thieblemont, co-presidents

Amnesty International Italy: Ileana Bello, director

ARCI: Raffaella Bolini, vice president

Asociacion Cultural Baizara: Iñigo López, director

Asociația pentru Tehnologie și Internet (ApTI): Alex Ștefănescu, programmer and activist

Aspiration Tech: Raegan MacDonald, director, policy leadership

Association e-Enfance /3018: Justine Atlan, national respresentative

Association marocaine des droits humains, Aziz Rhali, president

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Avaaz: Sarah Andrew, legal and campaign director

Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum: Mohammad Abdul Haque Anu, secretary general

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Center for the Study of Organized Hate (CSOH): Raqib Hameed Naik, executive director

Centre for Artificial Intelligence Ethics and Governance in Africa (CAIEGA): Raymond Amumpaire, team manager

Centre for Information Technology and Development: Y. Z. Ya'u, executive director

Centre for Legal Support: Fabakary Jammeh, executive director

Chez Violette: Christèle Copin, member

CIPSI: Guido Barbera, president

Citizen D: Domen Savič, director

Collectif Changer de Cap: Didier Minot, president

Community Focus Foundation Ghana (CFF-Ghana): Richard Kasu, executive director

Community Rights in Greece: Moussa Sangaré, director

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Coudes à coudes: Fatima Benomar, co-president

Danes je nov dan: Maja Cimerman, director

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Data for Good: Théo Alves, co-president

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Digital Access: Rigobert Kenmogne, executive secretary

Digital Action: Alexandra Pardal, interim executive co-director

Echap: Lila, co-founder

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EDRi: Claire Fernandez, executive director

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European Civic Forum: Alexandrina Najmowicz, secretary general

European House: Miklós Barabás, director

European Network Against Racism: Oyidiya Oji, advocacy adviser

Fair Vote UK: Kyle Taylor, founder

FIDH: Eleonore Morel, director general

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Fundación Datalat: Margarita Yépez Villareal, executive director

Génération Lumière: David Maenda Kithoko, president

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Global Witness: Ava Lee, campaigns manager

Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR): Khalid Ibrahim, executive director

Hermes Center – Hacking for Human Rights: Davide Del Monte, director

Héro•ïnes 95: Eina, activist

Hindus for Human Rights: Ria Chakrabarty, director of public policy

Homo Digitalis: Eleftherios Chelioudakis, co-founder and executive director

HuMENA pour les droits de l'homme et l'engagement civique: Mostafa Fouad, executive director

IDPAD (Hackney): Dr Toyin Agbetu, researcher

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Kairos Action: Alli Finn, campaigns director

La Maison de l'Europe: Ursula Serafin, director

La Quadrature du net: Raquel Radaut, spokesperson

Le Mouton Numérique: Christelle Gilabert, co-president

Le Mouvement: Priscillia Ludosky, campaign director

Le Planning familial: Sarah Durocher, president

Lève les yeux: Yves Marry, co-founder and general delegate

Ligue de l'Enseignement: Martine Besson, vice president

LOVE-Storm -Together against Online Hate: Björn Kunter, founder

Media Alliance of Zimbabwe: Nigel Nyamutumbu, coordinator

Mental Health Europe: Claudia Marinetti, director

Movimento Europeo Italia: Pier Virgilio Dastoli, president

MRAP: François Sauterey, co-president

Never again: Rafal Pankowski, co-founder

New School of the Anthropocene: Dr Michael Hrebeniak, founder

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Renaissance Numérique: Jean-François Lucas, general delegate

Rinascimento Green: Stephanie Brancaforte, executive director

Ritimo: Emmanuel Charles, co-president

Sciences Citoyennes: Jacques Testart, honorary president

Skyline International for Human Rights: Dima Samaro, director

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SOS homophobie: Julia Torlet, president

Speak Up: Gehad Hamdy, executive director

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Taiwan Association for Human Rights: Kuan-Ju Chou, deputy secretary general

Tech4Peace: Aws Al-Saadi, founder and president

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The Greek Forum of Refugees: Yonous Muhammadi, director

The Human Rights Cities Network: Frédérique Hanotier, board member

The Institute of Public Affairs Poland: Małgorzata Koziarek, project coordinator

The Novact Institute for Nonviolence: Luca Gervasoni Vila, director

Thraets: Owilla Abiro Mercy, co-founder

Volonteurope: Piotr Sadowski, secretary general

Vrijschrift.org: Walter van Holst, secretary of the board of directors

Zambian Cyber Security Initiative Foundation: John Tshinseki, president

Other organisations supporting the statement:

Nous toutes

Politiscope

Privacy Network

Rete per i Diritti Umani Digitali

SHARE Foundation

The Good Lobby

"Joint statement: AI as it is being developed is fuelling a global system of exploitation". Civic-forum.eu, 5.02.2025.

https://civic-forum.eu/statement/joint-statement-ai-as-it-is-being-developed-is-fuelling-a-global-system-of-exploitation