Human Rights II
Topic I: State censorship and surveillance in the age of artificial intelligence.

Background Information
Artificial intelligence (AI) has been highly discussed in recent years, in large part because of its rapid development. The technology can encompass a variety of systems with various goals, but identifying factors include being adaptive, self-learning, and mimicking human intelligence. Technologies consider preexisting datasets in order to make predictions. The rise in and improvement of this technology has many potential benefits, as well as causes for concern.

The modern history of artificial intelligence begins with research in the mid-20th century. In 1950, computer scientist Alan Turing published the highly influential work “Computing Machinery and Intelligence,” which considered the ability of machines to “think.” However, much of this midcentury work was theoretical.

In the late 1990s and into the 2000s, more development occurred. Large language models eventually emerged in the late 2010s before the consumer rollout of OpenAI’s ChatGPT in 2022. Much of the consumer artificial intelligence available is generative, creating text or images based on datasets and user prompting.

By the late 2010s, there were at least 75 countries using AI technology for the purpose of surveillance. According to those countries, the technology is used to monitor public safety and identify criminals. Example applications include complex camera systems in cities, facial recognition software, and predictive smart policing technology.

With such technology, threat mitigation is adaptable and efficient. AI reduces the need for human operators, and can be very thorough. However, there are also ethical concerns, namely a loss of privacy. In order for these systems to operate, they rely on the collection of data, which may be done without the consent of the individuals the data is being collected from. Additionally, artificial intelligence is only as good as the dataset it is trained on. There exists the possibility of artificial intelligence systems being trained on biased, incomplete, and unrepresentative data, which could lead to unfairness in its application. However, it is also possible for an AI trained on good data to avoid bias present in people.

United Nations Involvement
The United Nations has identified artificial intelligence as both able to “detect fraud, strengthen transparency and support access to justice,” but needing governance due to concerns around surveillance

Beginning in 2017, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) began examining potential “risks and opportunities” of technologies such as artificial intelligence as they pertain to the sustainable development goals, which include work towards peace, justice, and strong institutions. Analysis was provided by the High-level Committee on Programmes (HLCP). This culminated in the creation of the Inter-agency Working Group on AI

(IAWG-AI) in 2020, which coordinated AI-related initiatives in the United Nations and produced reports such as the “United Nations System White Paper on AI Governance.”

UNESCO’s General Conference adopted the “Recommendation on the Ethics of AI” in November 2021, applicable to all 194 UNESCO member states. The document advises that “In particular, AI systems should not be used for social scoring or mass surveillance purposes” and “Privacy, a right essential to the protection of human dignity, human autonomy and human agency, must be respected, protected and promoted throughout the life cycle of AI systems.”

Additionally, UN High Commissioner Volker Türk has stated, “AI-based algorithms often dictate what we see, shaping our opinions and perceptions of reality. Politicians use AI to weaponize disinformation and advance their own agendas…States are also using AI tools to monitor journalists and their sources online, violating their right to privacy.” In response, Türk announced in early 2025 that agencies such as UNESCO will assist tech companies in mitigating risks to journalists and civilians.

In 2025, the General Assembly adopted Resolution A/RES/79/325, which establishes the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI and Global Dialogue on AI Governance. The Global Dialogue will convene annually with stakeholders to share best practices and discuss cooperation, with the goals of handling potential ethical and social risks and encouraging transparency, accountability, and human oversight.

Bloc Positions

As of 2024, there was general support for AI legislation globally. In 2018, the European Union (EU) passed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), to ensure privacy and security to citizens. The 2021 EU AI Act attempts to make AI “safe, transparent, traceable, non-discriminatory and environmentally friendly.” China followed suit with their Data Security Law and Personal Data Information Protection Law, and national strategies in the United States and South America focused on similar policies.

Yet as of mid-2025, global perspectives in the EU, Japan, and the US had shifted to rescind legislation and support AI as a source of innovation and economic growth. The United States in particular, with the beginning of a new federal administration, has encouraged AI development. Still, Brazil and South Korea approved AI legislation in 2025.

Sources and Useful Link

Basic Information

Artificial Intelligence (AI) | United Nations

Artificial Intelligence | United Nations - CEB | UNSCEB

History of Artificial Intelligence

8 Key Moments in the Development of A.I. | The New York Times

History of artificial intelligence | Dates, Advances, Alan Turing, ELIZA, & Facts | Britannica

Ethics

THE 17 GOALS | SDGS

Ethical and regulatory implications of AI in cybersecurity surveillance | WJARR

Navigating the Intersection of AI, Surveillance, and Privacy | SDGS

Artificial Intelligence and the Sustainable Development Goals: Operationalizing technology for a sustainable future | UN Global Compact

UN Involvement

UN System White Paper AI Governance | UNSCEB

Journalism facing new threats from AI and censorship | UN News

Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence | UNSCEB

The UN Reaches AI Consensus – Now the Real Work Begins | Global Solutions Initiative

Regulation

Global AI law and policy trends update | IAPP