

THE INVISIBLE HAND HOLDS THE LEASH

Manushya's Statement on the preliminary report of the UN's Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence



Manushya Foundation's Statement on the preliminary report of the UN's Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence

Ever since the establishment of the [Scientific Panel](#) was hyped up during the Global Digital Compact deliberations, we at Manushya Foundation [rang the bells that the creation of this body was redundant](#), as it is duplicating ground already covered by established organisations such as UNESCO and the International Telecommunication Union. On 6 and 7 July, the United Nations launched the [Global Dialogue on AI Governance](#) in Geneva. This [preliminary report](#) was released in the days prior, explicitly positioned as the foundation upon which the two days of the dialogue were meant to rest. Upon reading the report, **we can safely say that calling it a disappointment is an understatement**. We cannot help but wonder why the report spends so many pages justifying its existence. Is it because it cannot actually do so based on its findings alone?

Like previous UN reports of which we had the pleasure of reading, this preliminary report reeks of neutrality by overpromising an 'evidence-based assessment' delivered under a mandate that is 'policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive'. In fact, there was a point when we were reading the report that we almost thought that it was written by any of the big consultancy firms. There is no space to invoke a politically-neutral report on AI in the face of an overpowering technology, owned by a handful of billionaires playing tic-tac-toe with our attention spans to see whose share price comes out on top.

Overall, this report is a citation collage with a well-organised annotated bibliography devoid of a dignified conviction and a purely hands-off approach that would eclipse Pontius Pilate. Three hundred and eighty-six references, forty panel members and three months of drafting gave birth to a document that, in any measurable attribute, has perfected the art (or the science?) of gesturing at a bland conclusion without actually ever landing on one. Why does a report so well-cited end up so toothless? A body that was given a mandate to assess risk without actual authority (or apparently the political will in the same manner) will always end up conceding its own evidence into corporate speak.

There is no denying that the report has certainly mustered a damning documentation of the extensive accumulation of capital in the AI market, including wage compression and profit-driven harm to vulnerable users. **Yet at every single turn, the report reaches for technocratic managerial business-minded solutions whilst leaving the most critical point deliberately ignored. Ownership is this report's boogeyman, the word that the report is so frightened about.** It will speak of capacity and access, but it will zip one's lip when it comes to mentioning that the computing power and the wealth these systems generate already belong, quite overwhelmingly and undeservedly, to a small number of firms and, by extension, the often-faceless people who own them. This is most evident in Section 3.3, which states 'the core unresolved question is distributional who captures the surplus' and then never answers it.

It is impossible to write a report that declares so plainly that the United States hosts three-quarters of the world's advanced AI computers and that 91 percent of notable models originate from private firms and somehow still describes the resulting concentration of power as a sheer 'divide' that the market can somehow narrow down either via training programs or literacy campaigns. Through the utilisation of states (competing for talents and capacity) as the unit of analysis, this report not only conceals the fact that the actual beneficiaries are a small

set of private corporations headquartered in a small set of states, but also flattens the more consequential divide between those who own this technology and literally everyone, in every town and country, who does not. The Global Fund on AI will only conceal the problem deeper by substituting ownership with comfortable, statist vocabulary. A call centre worker in Manila and a laid-off customer service agent in London will have far more in common with each other than either has with the shareholders of the AI firm whose model replaced them both.

Further, the report's language around children and the vulnerable omits a very important point. The report is willing to name sycophancy, engagement optimisation, and 'data extraction through intimacy' as documented classifications of harm. In fact, it was able to link them to real casualties and psychological trauma. But what does it suggest we do? A convenient long list of age-verification requirements, feature restrictions for minors and the legal incentives for companies to build safer systems on top of already existing impact assessments. But it skips the core argument and the very reason why this pandemonium even came to fruition--profit. The report was not blind to the harms this technology can do. As a matter of fact, they can perceive it clearly enough to even put it in a blue box, but they opted to look the other way. **Why can a report written by a panel of experts not bring itself to say that a system organised around extracting engagement from human loneliness for shareholder return will keep producing this outcome by design until the profit incentive itself is removed?** A company whose profit margin is contingent on keeping all of us talking has no internal incentive to stop, let alone regulate itself. This is the real incentive that the report refuses to name, not whatever it penned on page 25.

Everything we mentioned above is not to say that this report is completely in vain. It is preliminary after all. We do believe that the science is real. **If anything, this report has allowed us to see that the problem was never a lack of evidence, but a lack of political will.** A document that purely categorises the evidence that it gathered whilst detaching itself from the material and economic conditions that have put the world into its current state only produces the appearance of 'doing something' whilst leaving the whole architecture of power and greed fully intact. We know the world's problems will not be solved through reports, but through the collective power of the individuals to resist and organise. It is found in the picket lines and in the utter refusal to accept that wealth concentration of this magnitude is simply the price we have to pay for so-called progress. **We want a UN that supports that, one that stands with the people on the ground, rather than one that produces another report indexing human suffering as footnotes. If the panel is truly serious about the evidence it has gathered, we call on them to name ownership and the business model of Big Tech corporations as the central finding that the data they presented already support. What remains is the political will to call a spade a spade. We demand that the UN stop treating Big Tech as partners for change and start treating it as a concentration of power that we need to constrain.**