



Statement of the Scientific Advisory Board on Trust in Science

September 17, 2024

Science and technology are among the greatest achievements of humanity: helping to reduce poverty worldwide, extending human lifespans, improving our quality of life, and understanding our place in the cosmos. Scientific progress can help us solve some of humanity's greatest challenges.

To deliver on this promise and build healthy, more equitable, and safe societies, citizens must be engaged and informed about research and new developments in science and technology. A central challenge in such communication is the growing mistrust in science, its practitioners, and its institutions. In recent years, that mistrust has been fueled by a widespread perception that scientists and their institutions within the "elite establishment" may be out of touch and at times used for political purposes rather than for the public good. Lack of public trust has been further deepened by the spread of misinformation, disinformation, and the erosion of evidence-based thinking. In some fields, there is mistrust among scientists themselves, who sometimes work for competing companies, driving concern that research might be biased by conflicts of interests or financial pressures.

We believe that the United Nations, under the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (2024-2033) and working with diverse and multi-disciplinary scientific experts from across the globe, can play a role in restoring trust in several ways: providing UN leadership with assessments and horizon scans of developments in science and technology; helping to establish a layered network of trusted thought-leaders, including respected members of local communities; promoting science education and the importance of evidence-based thinking; facilitating dialogue amongst scientists, policymakers, and the public, offering open access to new information; encouraging scientists and their institutions to be responsive to social needs, including by advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and combatting the deep inequalities between global North and global South; and nourishing a "science culture" in which all citizens feel they have the right to participate and where the benefits of science are available to all.

To take these aspirations forward, we encourage the UN and its network of affiliated institutions to (1) create and support local forums for community leaders, businesses, laypeople, and scientists, where they can understand the nature of critical thinking in science, new developments, and participate in scientific research; (2) support "public repositories" of scientific research that are easily accessible, transparent, and understandable in plain-language; (3) promote science literacy programs in schools and work places, emphasising critical thinking, the scientific method, and the importance of evidence-based decision-making; (4) support, promote, and respond to annual surveys that assess public trust in science and identify mechanisms to combat misinformation and disinformation, especially in social media; (5) establish international scientific panels on AI and other potentially disruptive technologies for regular, reliable, and unbiased scientific assessments that inform policies and governance; and (6) support and facilitate communication and contacts between scientists worldwide.

Our Board is committed to elevating the role of science and technology within and beyond the UN, helping to build greater trust, upholding the human right to benefit from the safe, equitable development of science, and harnessing its enormous potential to meet the most pressing challenges facing us today and tomorrow.



About the Scientific Advisory Board

In August 2023, Secretary-General António Guterres appointed a Scientific Advisory Board to advise on critical issues at the intersection of science, technology, and society, fulfilling a commitment made in the [“Our Common Agenda”](#) report. The primary purpose of the Board is to provide the Secretary-General and senior UN leaders with independent, rigorous, and actionable advice on cutting-edge science, anticipate emerging issues, and offer recommendations for how the UN can manage risks and harness benefits. The Board is composed of seven eminent scientists in the fields of artificial intelligence, environmental sciences, and biology. It is supported by the UN’s Chief Scientists, the UN Technology Envoy, the Rector of UN University, and a network of 11 scientific organizations that expand its geographic and topical coverage. The Scientific Advisory Board seeks to foster greater trust in science, increase the United Nations’ use of scientific evidence in decision-making, and elevate the role of science across multilateral forums.

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For more information visit the Board’s webpage:

<https://www.un.org/scientific-advisory-board/en>

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