

Advancing science diplomacy

The International Science Council's role and contributions

The International Science Council (ISC) is the leading non-governmental organization representing the natural and social sciences, as well as humanities, through a global network of **250 scientific organizations** across **140 countries**.

The ISC believes that the non-governmental sector has a critical role to play in science diplomacy, both directly as track two organizations and in close partnership with the multilateral sector. By providing a **non-partisan, inclusive** and **diverse** scientific platform, the ISC strengthens science diplomacy efforts in addressing global challenges and advancing sustainable development.



**International
Science Council**

The global voice for science

Our unique role in science diplomacy

The ISC has a **long and rich history** of engagement in science diplomacy, including through its predecessor organizations, the International Council for Science and International Social Science Council. Notably, our contributions include significant support to the creation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (**IPCC**) and Intergovernmental Science–Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (**IPBES**), fostering scientific exchanges across all countries despite **geopolitical tensions or conflicts**, and informing the design of science–policy interfaces in areas such as agrifood systems, plastic pollution and biological weapons.

The ISC upholds this legacy and its long-standing commitment to science diplomacy by:

- Promoting international scientific **collaboration, exchange** and **mobility**;
- Defending **scientific freedom** and the responsible conduct of science;
- Advocating for **science in diplomatic negotiations** and decision-making;
- Providing **scientific advice** in diplomatic forums;
- Strengthening the protection and governance of the **global commons** (ocean, atmosphere, biodiversity, outer space and polar regions);
- Building **scientific knowledge** to address **current and emerging issues** with implications for global development and security;
- Assisting ISC Members in more direct **science diplomacy matters** at local and regional levels;
- **Building capacity** in science diplomacy for ISC Members and in the science community.

Science diplomacy is multifaceted and the ISC's multipronged approach to it covers **five key dimensions**:

Fostering equitable dialogue on issues of global concern

The ISC plays a major role in facilitating **inclusive and equitable conversations** on global issues, promoting **knowledge sharing**, fostering a **shared understanding** of the issues requiring global collective action, and helping to reduce knowledge asymmetries that can hamper the ability of countries to participate in and influence global governance. This is particularly acute around **new and emerging issues**, such as disruptive technologies, which introduce rapid changes and new risks and opportunities.

Example: Science inputs into the Biological Weapons Convention

The ISC has been working with the Biological Weapons Convention to provide informal scientific advice to support deliberations of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention, especially in relation to compliance and verification, international cooperation and assistance, and the possible establishment of a scientific and technical advisory mechanism for the convention.

The ISC has held briefings for diplomats on these issues to support a **stronger understanding of the rapid and multifaceted developments** in the life sciences, biotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI) and other fields that are reshaping the biothreats landscape.

A stronger science diplomacy interface can also support discussions on new avenues to enhance the **implementation of the convention** and the **responsible governance of dual-use research** of concern, considering wide disparities in science, technology and innovation capacities across countries.

Advancing international scientific collaboration and equity

The ISC champions **openness, inclusivity** and **equity** in science, especially in light of the unequal scientific capacities and opportunities between countries.

It also addresses the challenges posed by competing geostrategic interests and tensions, which often lead to heightened concerns over research security. This context undermines international scientific collaboration and the potential to leverage science to inform global responses and science as a global public good.

The ISC advocates for equitable access to scientific collaboration, knowledge and data sharing, while working to **minimize misuse or politicization of research** in a way that prioritizes equity, transparency and fairness.

Example: Supporting science in times of crisis

The ISC mobilizes its Members and partners to respond to and support scientists affected by major crises, including in **Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine, Sudan** and **Ukraine**. It raises awareness about effective support mechanisms in times of crisis, facilitates direct assistance to affected researchers, and contributes to major international reports.

In 2023, following two co-led conferences on the **war in Ukraine**, the ISC produced recommendations that were adopted by research granting bodies to guide research calls and support for science systems under threat. This experience underscored the **critical role of non-partisan actors** such as the ISC in convening international dialogue during crises.

Encouraging responsible governance of disruptive technologies

The ISC promotes the **ethical governance of emerging technologies**, such as AI, synthetic biology and geoeengineering. By leveraging its global reach and expertise, the ISC can facilitate multilateral dialogues to address gaps in governance and support the **development of regulatory frameworks** to ensure that developments in science and technology support equitable and sustainable development and minimize the risks of misuse or unintended negative consequences.

Example: Assessing countries' readiness to leverage AI in science

The ISC has led a mapping of AI integration into research and science ecosystems, with a particular focus on the Global South.

With 18 country case studies, the study and resulting paper raises **critical issues surrounding AI for science**, including the need for better data strategies and the importance of regional and transnational collaboration.

Supporting the protection of the global commons

The ISC plays a crucial role in **safeguarding the global commons**, such as the atmosphere, oceans and polar regions, by stimulating research and scientific cooperation and promoting peace, security, equitable access and responsible use.

Example: 5th International Polar Year 2032–2033

The ISC is playing a leading role in the development and implementation of the 5th International Polar Year 2032–2033 (IPY-5), in collaboration with the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research, the International Arctic Science Committee, the World Meteorological Organization and other organizations.

IPY-5 will facilitate groundbreaking global, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research to inform **international cooperation, decision-making** and **governance mechanisms** addressing urgent polar and planetary challenges.

Strengthening science–policy interfaces and providing science advice to inform decision-making

The ISC serves as a **trusted scientific adviser** to multilateral organizations and coalitions of actors by convening and providing multidisciplinary scientific inputs into intergovernmental deliberations and negotiations. It ensures that **diverse perspectives** contribute to the development of shared understanding and the shaping of solutions to critical global issues.

The ISC also draws on its experience in organizing **scientific advice** at the international level to support the design, creation and implementation of mechanisms of scientific advice.

Example: UN Group of Friends on Science for Action

The ISC proudly serves jointly with UNESCO as the Secretariat for the **UN Group of Friends on Science for Action**, an informal coalition of Member States led by Belgium, India and South Africa.

The group promotes the application of **actionable knowledge** in policies and programmes across the United Nations system and facilitates Member States' access to actionable knowledge for **evidence-based decision-making**.

The ISC mobilizes the global scientific community to help the group achieve its goals through expert briefings, strategic advice on science–policy interfacing, and other technical inputs.

The ISC is currently working on a **full report on science diplomacy** with consultations during the Summit of the Future, and in the context of the ISC General Assembly in Oman, **foreseen for mid-2025**.

Learn more: council.science/diplomacy

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