

# 'Warp speed' technology must be 'force for good' UN chief tells web leaders

Technological advances are happening "at a warp speed," United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres said on Monday in Lisbon, Portugal, as a major three-day Web Summit got underway.

He pointed out more than "90 per cent of the data that exists today in the world was created in the two last years," noting that what while it used to cost \$1 million to store a megabyte of data, the current price tag is less than two cents.

Technologies like blockchain – digital records linked together using encryption – or gene testing are now common technologies, he continued.

"Artificial intelligence is everywhere, helping to buy and sell shares, helping police surveillance and even helping people to choose their soul mates," he said.

He asserted that technology is yielding enormous benefits, providing cures for disease, fighting hunger, boosting economic development and growth globally, and effectively addressing world problems.

However, acknowledging that globalization is imbalanced and unequal, the UN chief cited the 2030 Agenda and [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) as the UN's blueprint to help reverse inequality.

Machines that have the power and the discretion to take human lives are politically unacceptable, are morally repugnant and should be banned by international law – *the Secretary-General said to thunderous applause*

He said the speed of cutting-edge technology was essential to achieving the SDGs: "[UNICEF](#) is now able to map the connections between schools in remote areas", he asserted, adding that the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP) is using blockchain to track payments to aid recipients and the High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR](#)) is using biotechnologies in identification, to better support and protect refugees.

Mr. Guterres cautioned that the world is not preparing for the social impact of the "fourth industrial revolution", which includes new job creation but also redundancy for some jobs made obsolete by technology, saying that it would result in unemployment and societal disruption.

He stressed that while "a massive investment in education" and "a new generation of safety nets" will be needed, more must be done to address this challenge.

Turning to the question of artificial intelligence he said machines were doing more and more tasks formally reserved for humans, and increasingly do them better, like medical diagnosis and police surveillance.

However, "the weaponization of artificial intelligence is a serious danger," spelled out the UN chief, cautioning against the impact of technology on warfare.

"With the weaponization of artificial intelligence, the prospect of autonomous weapons that can select and destroy targets will make it very difficult to avoid escalation of conflicts and to guarantee the respect of international humanitarian law and international human rights law," he underscored.

To thunderous applause, the Secretary-General stated that: "Machines that have the power and the discretion to take human lives are politically unacceptable, are morally repugnant and should be banned by international law."

Because tech moves so fast, new platforms need to be created to address these problems he said emphasizing that he wanted the UN to be a platform, where various groups can come together to discuss and agree on protocols and other mechanisms that allow for cyberspace, the internet and AI "to be essentially a force for good."