Title: United front: Asia and the Middle East push for ethical AI - Oman Observer

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United front: Asia and the Middle East push for ethical AI Jomar Mendoza Published: 6:50 PM, Jul 03, 2024 Dr Said Jaboob, Deputy Vice Chancellor, UTAS (Oman), Dr Jassim Haji, President Artificial Intelligence Society President International Group of Artificial Intelligence (Bahrain), Dr Khaled Alkhaledi, Kuwait University (Kuwait), Saleh Alnosiaan, Strategic Partner at SDAIA (Saudi Arabia) and Hassan Fida al Lawati, National Program Head for Artificial Intelligence & Advanced Techs at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology ? Oman. SHARE Listen MUSCAT: The Islamic World AI Charter (IWAIC) Regional Workshop, which kicked off on Tuesday in Muscat and held under the auspices of Dr Khamis bin Said al Jabri, Chairman of Oman Vision 2040 Implementation Follow-up Unit, underscored the urgency and strategies for adopting ethical AI practices across member states. In an interview with Dr Jassim Haji, President of the Artificial Intelligence Society and the International Group of Artificial Intelligence, major highlights of the landmark IWAIC regional workshop were revealed. Dr Haji emphasised ICESCO's (Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) inclusive drive to promote an AI ethics charter that resonates with the cultural and regional sensibilities of its member states. "We're

actively engaging member states through regional workshops like IWAIC's, ensuring everyone is involved. This collaborative approach is vital for gaining widespread support," he explained to the Observer. ICESCO's strategy includes aligning the AI ethics charter with existing national initiatives and Islamic values, enhancing cultural relevance and easing adoption. Additionally, capacity building and knowledge sharing are pivotal. "AI development levels differ across the region. We must help member states develop necessary skills to implement the charter effectively. The GCC, with its AI expertise, can lead this effort," Dr Haji noted. The workshop highlighted promising collaborative efforts among Asian and Middle Eastern countries, fostering a commitment to shared learning and cooperation. Countries with advanced AI frameworks are sharing their experiences, making knowledge transfer invaluable. The formation of a sub-regional committee, comprising government, academia, industry, and AI stakeholders, marks a significant step forward. This committee will coordinate efforts and develop strategies tailored to regional needs. However, challenges abound. "AI readiness varies greatly across countries, complicating a one-size-fits-all approach," Dr Haji pointed out. Balancing technological advancement with ethical considerations is another major hurdle. "The economic allure of AI can sometimes overshadow ethical concerns," he added, highlighting the lack of standardised AI education and training programmes that incorporate ethics. Dr Haji called for a comprehensive strategy to address these challenges. This involves developing customised capacity-building programmrs, establishing regional centres of excellence for AI ethics, and fostering public-private partnerships to bridge the skills gap. The IWAIC initiative's focus on knowledge sharing and collaborative networks is a positive step. Harmonising regulatory frameworks is essential for a consistent and ethical approach to AI development. "A comprehensive regional accord could provide a common ethical foundation while allowing for local adaptations," Dr Haji suggested. Cross-border working groups and committees could facilitate dialogue and coordination between national regulatory bodies. "The sub-regional committee on AI could play a crucial role," he added. The workshop also emphasised the importance of shared definitions and standards. The AI glossary being developed with the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority

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(SDAIA) is a significant step toward creating a common language around AI ethics and regulation in the region. While complete uniformity may be unattainable given diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts, the focus should be on achieving interoperability and mutual recognition of standards. "Ongoing dialogue and collaboration, as promoted by initiatives like the IWAIC workshops, will be key to a harmonised approach to AI regulation in the region," Dr Haji concluded.

The IWAIC workshop was organised by the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO) in partnership with the University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS) and the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology of Oman, and in collaboration with the Omani National Commission for Education, Culture and Science. Oman Observer is now on the WhatsApp channel. Click here SHARE ARTICLE