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GLOBAL CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

When I started at the UN, I noticed a higher number of interns, though they often came from specific regions. This was primarily because most UN internships were unpaid. We've previously discussed and written about the need for greater equity in internships, especially in expensive cities like Geneva. Although many agencies began changing their policies, the global pandemic hindered progress due to restrictions.

In this issue, we feature several articles from ILO interns sharing their current experiences. I thoroughly enjoyed reading and communicating with them, and I hope you find their stories inspiring for your daily work.

Do you feel like we are living in unprecedented times? You might find the article about the unconventional Franco-British engineer, Brunel, particularly interesting. It offers a unique perspective on our feelings of constant change and challenges.

As summer is in full swing, don't miss another article from our "Cols Routiers de Suisse" series, highlighting places to visit. You can also revisit our previous issues for more options!

Enjoy this issue! //

OPPORTUNITÉS DE CARRIÈRE MONDIALE

Lorsque j'ai commencé à l'ONU, j'ai remarqué un plus grand nombre de stagiaires, bien qu'ils viennent souvent de régions spécifiques. Cela était principalement dû au fait que la plupart des stages à l'ONU n'étaient pas rémunérés. Nous avons déjà discuté et écrit sur la nécessité d'une plus grande équité dans les stages, en particulier dans des villes coûteuses comme Genève. Bien que de nombreuses agences aient commencé à changer leurs politiques, la pandémie mondiale a freiné les progrès en raison des restrictions.

Dans ce numéro, nous présentons plusieurs articles de stagiaires de l'OIT partageant leurs expériences actuelles. J'ai pris beaucoup de plaisir à les lire et à communiquer avec eux, et j'espère que vous trouverez leurs histoires inspirantes pour votre travail quotidien.

Avez-vous l'impression de vivre une époque sans précédent? Vous pourriez trouver l'article sur l'ingénieur franco-britannique non conventionnel, Brunel, particulièrement intéressant. Il offre une perspective unique sur nos sentiments de changement constant et de défis.

Alors que l'été bat son plein, ne manquez pas un autre article de notre série «Cols Routiers de Suisse», mettant en lumière des lieux à visiter. Vous pouvez également consulter nos numéros précédents pour plus d'options!

Bonne lecture! //

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N°843

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Not “just” interns

IF YOU WORK IN THE UN SYSTEM, THEN YOU WORK WITH INTERNS.

But do you really see them? Do you recognize their excellence? Do you invest in their potential? Or are they “just” interns to you - almost-invisible, interchangeable, doing work on the periphery?

Over the past twenty-five years that I’ve been with the International Labour Organization (ILO), I’ve had the privilege of working with generations of interns. I am continually impressed by the high quality of these young professionals. They speak multiple languages, have excellent academic records, they approach problems from innovative perspectives, and they bring such a diversity of thinking and lived experience.

They’re certainly not “just” interns.

And that’s the reason why we made space in this edition of newSpecial for four ILO interns to write their own stories – stories that might otherwise have been overlooked. Over the past few weeks,

it’s been enjoyable to read their drafts and to work with them to edit the final product.

One intern writes about his work on AI, including the importance of consulting with actual human beings. Another intern talks about her work to promote the welfare and wellbeing of ILO staff. Yet another considers the culture of the ILO and how it favourably compares to other work experiences she’s had. And another talks about their experience with an “invisible” disability at work, and what the UN can do to meaningfully include all interns, whether they have disabilities or not.

These interns are diverse in their national origins, their mother tongues, university studies, etc. But, listening to their stories, you get a real sense of unity of purpose, of dedication to social justice, and to the promotion of decent work.

The authors of these articles aren’t “just” interns. In fact, there’s no such thing. We all serve under the same UN flag. We all promote the same values. We all face the same pressures, the same security threats, and we all confront the same uncertainty over our future.

In fact, many of us who now have careers in the United Nations started off as interns, whether it was in the UN system, or with governments or NGOs. Don’t you remember those moments of great transition and change and hope? Don’t you remember how challenging it was to move halfway around the world to follow your dream, to make a good first impression, to strike a balance between work and family life? Maybe you were right out of your master’s degree or Ph.D., and you were trying to piece together those “magical” two years of relevant work experience, so you could apply for that first short-term contract?

Whoever you are and however long ago your first internship was, I think it’s important to remember what that experience was like, and to appreciate the interns you work with today.

A major takeaway from these articles is that each incoming intern represents an opportunity to transform our organizations, if we only recognize them as the change-makers and future leaders that they are. I hope that these articles will go some way to showcasing their excellence, and to debunking the idea that anyone is “just” an intern. //

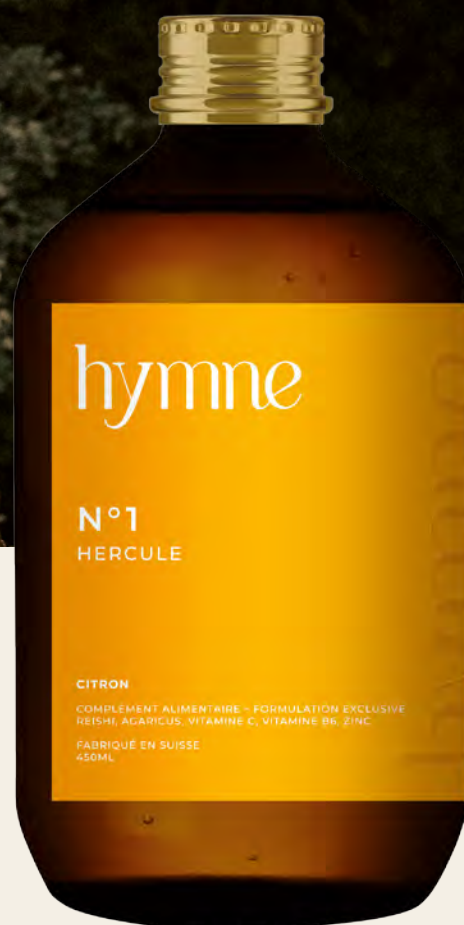
Each incoming intern is an opportunity to transform our organizations.



TEXT ERIC STENER CARLSON, UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS
PHOTO ISTOCK

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Seeing the Unseen

AN INTERN'S PERSPECTIVE ON INVISIBLE DISABILITIES AT THE ILO

When we think of disabilities, we often picture visible signs – a wheelchair, a cane, or a hearing aid. Yet, for millions of people around the world, their disabilities remain hidden from plain view. These are invisible disabilities, and their invisibility can lead to misunderstanding and exclusion by others.

UNDERSTANDING INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

Invisible disabilities refer to a wide range of physical, psychosocial, and neurological conditions that are not immediately apparent (to outside observers). These can include chronic pain conditions such as fibromyalgia or arthritis, mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, neurodivergent conditions including autism and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and illnesses such as multiple sclerosis, lupus, or chronic fatigue syndrome.

What makes these disabilities “invisible” is not their impact – which can be profound – but rather the lack of outward signs. A person may look “fine” on the outside while facing severe internal challenges that affect multiple aspects of their life. This can lead to a painful paradox: people with invisible disabilities can be disbelieved, dismissed, or pressured to “prove” their conditions. This lack of visibility fuels misunderstanding. Colleagues might wonder why someone frequently takes time off, avoids social events, or appears disengaged. Without understanding the context, incorrect assumptions may be made. As a result, individuals with invisible disabilities not only have to manage their health conditions but also contend with stigma and skepticism.

THE INTERN EXPERIENCE: BETWEEN ASPIRATION AND ADAPTATION

As an intern at the ILO, I've become increasingly aware of how invisible disabilities can shape – and complicate – the early stages of a professional journey. Interns are eager to learn, contribute, and prove themselves. Yet for those managing invisible conditions, they can feel under pressure that can be quietly overwhelming.

Thankfully, at the ILO, interns with disabilities (whether visible or not) are meaningfully included. For example, the ILO has a great HR team that keeps in touch with the interns and answers any questions or concerns they may have. There is a tailored training on disability inclusion for supervisors of interns with disabilities. Also, offices are equipped with ergonomic features, such as adjustable tables and desks, to accommodate various physical requirements.

But not all organizations around the world provide such support to their interns. And it's not always easy to ask for reasonable adjustments (also known as reasonable accommodations) when you're still learning the ropes in a new workplace or when you worry about being perceived as less capable. The stakes feel high: will disclosing a need for flexibility affect the chance of a future opportunity? Will being transparent about mental health struggles shift how supervisors see me?

These questions are part of a broader reality. Interns, by nature of their temporary status, often feel they have little room to “rock the boat”. That can make it even harder to speak up – especially when the need isn't immediately visible. This silence, though understandable, can contribute to further isolation.

WHAT CAN THE UN DO?

The ILO is creating an inclusive environment for all interns, including interns with invisible disabilities. This is very important, because it is not just about the current pool of interns within the organization. With its focus on social justice and decent work for all, the ILO has a unique opportunity – and responsibility – to lead by example. As the ILO, and the greater UN, goes forward on disability inclusion, here are two simple yet meaningful actions that all agencies can take:

- Awareness training for supervisors, with a focus on recognizing and supporting interns with non-apparent disabilities.
- Mental health support that is tailored not only to long-term staff but also to the short-term and dynamic needs of interns.

These are not radical demands – they are acts of alignment between values and practice.



It's important to recognize and support all interns, including interns with "invisible" disabilities.



FOSTERING EMPATHY AND INCLUSION

Awareness and empathy are the first steps toward inclusion. Recognising that not all disabilities are visible is essential. So is resisting the impulse to judge based on what we see – or don't see.

Supporting someone doesn't require complete understanding. Sometimes, a listening ear, respectful curiosity, or willingness to adjust a deadline can make a world of difference. Instead of "You don't look sick," we can ask, *"Is there something I can do to support you?"*

Small gestures, done with sincerity, ripple outward.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Invisible disabilities challenge us to expand our understanding of inclusion. For interns navigating new responsibilities while managing invisible conditions, the challenge is even more pronounced.

But it is also an opportunity for organizations like the ILO to continue leading with compassion, and for all of us, regardless of role, to help make the unseen seen. Not with our eyes, but with empathy, respect, and action. //

TEXT REDOUANE BEKRAR, ILO INTERN
PHOTO ISTOCK

From Academia to Action: Disability Inclusion and Social Justice at the ILO

"NO ONE CAN MAKE YOU FEEL INFERIOR WITHOUT YOUR CONSENT."
ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

As a neurodiverse adult with Level 1 Autism (formerly Asperger's), navigating the professional world has profoundly shaped my path. The transition from academia to policy work was not just a career pivot – it was a deeply personal journey rooted in lived experience and a commitment to social justice. Currently, my internship at the International Labour Organization (ILO) is providing a space where I can be my authentic self and make an impact in the real world.

BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE

My internship at the ILO is a unique opportunity, as I support two departments: the Staff Welfare Office (SWO) and the Office of the Mediator. Both departments play critical roles in supporting staff at ILO. The SWO works on implementing the ILO's Action Plan on Mental Health & Well-being, and the Anti-Stigma campaign, and supporting staff. The Office of the Mediator at ILO is dedicated to restorative practices. While their mandates differ, both share a common purpose: a staff- and need-focused approach to provide a safe and supportive workplace. By working alongside these departments, and with staff members throughout the organization, I'm getting a holistic view of how human-centered policy is translated into everyday action in the ILO.

INCLUSION IN ACTION

However, I'm not just impressed by the policy work at the ILO, but also by its culture. As someone diagnosed with autism at age seven, I have learned how to blend in by camouflaging my differences and adapting to various work situations to meet social expectations, which can be both mentally and emotionally taxing. At the ILO, however, I am encouraged to share my experiences and my story. Both my supervisors and colleagues were not only interested in hearing my perspective, but they were also eager to learn from it.

Informal conversations at work often turn into moments of mutual learning, and I feel empowered to speak openly about neurodiversity and disability, and the challenges this includes. It is this dedication to social justice and stepping away from tokenism and tick-box inclusion strategies that make the ILO adaptable and successful in their mandate to promote decent work; for, if the crew of the ship have clear instructions and solidarity, the ship can survive whatever the sea or Mother Nature throws at it.

I have found that structures like the ILO's Human Resources Department, Staff Welfare Office, the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Branch, the ILO Medical Service, and the Office of the Mediator (amongst others) are truly committed to disability inclusion, social justice and decent work for all. Another key support structure is the ILO's Employee Resource Group (ERG) on Disability Inclusion, made up of staff with disabilities and staff with dependents with disabilities. The ERG contributes to discussions on inclusion and representation, and it supports interns with disabilities. Having such a group just shows how important disability inclusion is to the ILO and how authentic the dedication of ILO staff is.

DISABILITY AS INSIGHT, NOT IMPEDIMENT

Disability is often framed in extremes – either as something to be pitied or something to be overcome heroically. But neither narrative really fits the reality. Autism is not a deficit, and it's not a personality; it is a part of a person just as any other part of the human spirit. Without going into positive stereotypes, autism can provide a useful theoretical lens or a source to understand how to make the world a better place. Because I was diagnosed young (and, at the time, girls and women being on the spectrum was a "new concept"), it forced me to learn how to be mentally adaptable, to gain emotional intelligence, and to be openminded – qualities that are increasingly vital in a world facing climate shocks, political instability, and economic uncertainty.

TEXT LESLIE ADER, ILO INTERN
PHOTO ISTOCK



The workplace should recognize these possibilities of diversity, not just in a physical sense but also a mental one as well. At a time when institutions are asked to do more with less, disability communities offer valuable lessons in living with flexibility and resilience. We have long operated in fragmented, under-resourced environments, so, out of necessity, we have built networks and devised creative solutions. These are not just survival tactics; these are skills that can make the workplace a better place.

LESSONS IN RESILIENCE AND REFLECTION

One of the most transformative lessons from my time at the ILO has been the importance of internal narratives. Inclusion is both institutional and emotional. Colleagues have shown me meaningful ways of utilizing my knowledge and personhood. I find this ironic, because, when I was younger, I was the one “being treated” or misunderstood in school by teachers who often didn’t grasp (or refused to follow) legal norms for the inclusion of persons with disabilities – because they thought it required more work or energy.

Resilience is about building a narrative that is relevant and fluid, so you allow yourself to grow and not focus on limitations. As someone who has moved across countries and cultures, I’ve often grappled with the tension between seeking care and asserting control. At the ILO, I have found a space to reflect, grow, and reframe my understanding of self-worth. The organization’s support systems have helped me move beyond “fitting in”, toward fully showing up.

MOVING FORWARD

While the ILO is a real leader in many aspects of disability inclusion, continued progress is needed; this will require vigilance and intention, especially in times of crisis. Based on my experience, I offer the following recommendations:

- Expand representation of persons with disabilities at all levels, especially in the area of professional mobility and transitions.
- Continue to deepen partnerships with Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to ground policy in lived experience.
- Continue training and awareness initiatives that reflect the dynamic nature of identity and access, as well as support spaces (both formal and informal) for storytelling and shared learning.

The ILO is already following these steps, and not by ticking boxes. Rather, the ILO is shifting work culture in a positive direction. This is because disability inclusion isn’t a static goal but an evolving process, one that demands collective responsibility.

To other neurodiverse colleagues in the UN system, I say this: your perspective is not a liability, it’s a leadership asset. Ask for what you need. Build your network. Know that your lived experience can reshape systems and policies for the better.

As Eleanor Roosevelt once said, *“Do what you feel in your heart to be right – for you’ll be criticized anyway.” //*

From research to reality:
An intern’s journey shows how inclusive
policy thrives on lived experience,
even amid global uncertainty.

A Neurodivergent Person's Perspective

THRIVING WITH ADHD
AT THE ILO



TEXT & PHOTO
JYOT MOTWANI, ILO INTERN

Hi, I'm Jyot, an intern with the Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Branch at the International Labour Organization (ILO). I'm based out of the headquarters in Geneva, where my work focuses on HIV and AIDS. I'm also finishing a master's degree in international and development studies here in Geneva. I've been at the ILO for a few months now, and I can genuinely say this is one of the most accommodating workplaces I've ever been a part of.

I was 23 when I was diagnosed with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). As a neurodivergent person, you tend to become an unwitting litmus test for how inclusive your environment really is. Before I got to the ILO, I studied law and business administration—fields that are, at least in India (my home country), known for their intensity and lack of accommodations for people who work in them. So, coming to the ILO has felt like a breath of fresh air. For example, I can easily ask my supervisors if I need any reasonable adjustments to work at my best capacity. I don't feel like I'm constantly swimming upstream, which gives me both hope and a sense of responsibility to contribute to creating similar inclusive spaces for others.

I moved to Geneva two years ago, and it has been an adventure - exciting but difficult. For neurodivergent individuals, the lack of support systems and the challenge of adjusting to a new environment can create a vacuum; there's an absence of pre-existing support like family, friends or certain privileges of being a citizen in your own country. But, despite the challenges, I'm now in the final stages of my thesis, which explores the feminization of agriculture in India. I'm studying development schemes that target women in agriculture and examining their social and economic impacts.

Working on a thesis is a double-edged sword. It's rewarding to dive deep into a topic that interests you, but it can also be isolating and overwhelming, especially when you work alone. For someone with ADHD, having a team can help overcome decision paralysis and create a structured work environment which helps the process go smoother. That's why being part of a supportive team at the ILO has made a lot of difference. My team knows about my ADHD, and there is no judgment about it. That openness has created a space where I feel safe and understood, something that's still rare, even in academic settings.

For example, I once joined a voluntary group project at university to get more experience. The working styles of my team members were drastically different, and there was little room for discussing diverse needs or accommodating different ways of functioning. It was difficult, even hostile at times. I never felt comfortable disclosing my ADHD, and I often felt misunderstood.

That experience reminded me how essential it is to create environments where team members feel safe enough to communicate their needs. For neurodivergent individuals, being misunderstood is a constant threat. A safe communication space doesn't just benefit us; it helps everyone work better together. When I feel safe, I'm more transparent, more grounded, and more focused.

Here's something that might help you understand the neurodivergent experience a bit better: imagine having only a few spoons of energy each day. Every task, work, social interaction, navigating overstimulation from lights or sounds—uses up a spoon. By the end of the day, I sometimes don't even have enough spoons left for basic tasks like cooking dinner or doing laundry. Managing time and energy takes constant calculation and planning. But life is unpredictable - too many changes in routine can unravel an entire day's plan. That's exhausting.



Jyoti Motwani during
the internship.

Despite all this, there are gifts that come with the way my brain works. I notice patterns quickly. I process information deeply and think fast. These traits are incredibly useful when I'm doing research, brainstorming with a team, or simply navigating the world. They also make me a better listener, a more empathetic teammate, and a more reflective person.

When I'm engaged in research, my ADHD allows me to bring depth and intensity to the work through hyperfocus. It helps me think through angles I might not have initially considered and find gaps in my research that could otherwise go unnoticed. Whether I'm mapping complex legal and policy frameworks or analysing case studies from different regions in India, this ability to think across disciplines becomes one of my greatest strengths.

At the same time, I've learned that I need boundaries and routines to protect myself from burn-out. Balancing that remains a work in progress, but I'm grateful to be in an environment that supports that journey.

In many ways, being at the ILO has helped me see how good policy and thoughtful leadership can create inclusive and supportive spaces. But more than that, it's reminded me why I chose to work in the social sciences in the first place. Living with ADHD has taught me to move through the world with deep empathy, and it's that empathy that fuels my drive to work on inequality, justice, and inclusion.

The challenges I've faced have made me more attuned to the invisible struggle others carry. And I believe that's exactly why people like us, people with different ways of thinking, sensing, and experiencing, need to be involved in shaping our communities. There's a growing need to build environments that aren't just efficient or functional, but kind, and supportive.

For this change to happen, we all need to participate, not just in adapting to the world as it is. We need to change how the world works and challenge the norms that hold people back. For me that's what this work is about, creating space for difference, understanding, and the possibility of something better. My experience as an intern with the ILO is a great example of this, and I hope to use that experience as a springboard to further changes in the future. //

Shaping the United Nations' future

WITH RESPONSIBLE AI AND INCLUSIVE ANALYTICS

I have been fortunate to spend the past few months as an intern in the ILO's Department of Statistics, working alongside my supervisor Dr. Shutong Ding and many other generous colleagues. Together, we enriched our Department's AI Guide, developed an NLP-driven search¹ for labour statistics and integrated an AI reporting module into the Labour Market Information System². Throughout this experience, I've learned that weaving responsible AI and inclusive analytics into every workflow is vital for the ILO's (and the overall UN system's) lasting impact.

HOW MY INTERNSHIP INSPIRED ME TO ADVOCATE FOR RESPONSIBLE AI

From our very first one-on-one meeting, Dr. Ding made it clear that responsible AI must underpin all our analyses. My teammates showed genuine curiosity about using generative models without introducing new biases. (An example of bias would be a generative AI that portrays nurses predominantly as women and doctors mostly as men, potentially reinforcing sexist stereotypes.) As I explored UNESCO's Ethics Guidelines on AI and the United Nations Secretary-General's Roadmap on Digital Cooperation, I came to appreciate that transparency, fairness and human-centred design are not lofty ideals but, rather, practical safeguards.

I have also been challenged along the way, which is a good thing. A colleague once asked, "Do we really need an ethics checkpoint before every project?" That got me thinking about how best to get the point across. As a result, I refined our "When and Why" guidance to show how these brief reviews actually streamline decision-making, rather than delay it. That conversation helped me realize that my role extends beyond building tools to fostering the ethical frameworks that guide their use.

COLLABORATION DURING MY INTERNSHIP: SPARKING INNOVATION IN AI TOGETHER

Responsible AI provided the "why"; collaboration revealed the "how." At our AI Roundtables, statisticians, Human Rights officers, communications specialists and interns came together to share insights, and this diversity of voices led to real improvements. For example, a communications colleague suggested transforming our data-heavy dashboard into a narrative-driven story – with that change, we were suddenly able to clarify complex labour trends for non-technical audiences. A human rights peer reminded us to include consent clauses in our text-mining³ workflows, and a geospatial expert showed how tagging results by region and sector can highlight locally relevant data. All these improvements were made possible by open dialogue.

Building on these ideas, Dr. Ding and I proposed an NLP-driven search that lets analysts retrieve tables and narrative excerpts in seconds. I also helped add an AI reporting tool to our Labour Market Information System to gather data automatically⁴, reduce regional bias⁵, and flag unusual figures⁶ in country reports. "I never thought NLP could pull up ILO statistics so fast," one colleague remarked – proof that inclusive collaboration accelerates innovation.

FROM INTERN TO ADVOCATE: MY JOURNEY PROMOTING ETHICAL AND INCLUSIVE AI

Having moved from prototypes to practical deployment, I'm now helping embed these practices across the Department. Over the coming year, I will assist with AI training sessions – covering prompt engineering⁷, bias audits and human-centred workflows – so every colleague gains hands-on experience. I also curate a monthly resource roundup newsletter, sharing the latest research, tool releases and UN policy updates to help teams stay current.

TEXT & PHOTO YUNXIANG GUO, ILO'S INTERN,
CO-PRESIDENT OF THE ILO'S INTERN BOARD



Beyond the ILO, I've reached out to interns at WTO, WHO, ITU and other agencies, encouraging them to explore AI's potential for sustainable development. I have also received great feedback from them. Next, my Statistics colleagues and I will contribute to the UN's AI for Good initiative, bringing back lessons on data sovereignty and governance.

Reflecting on this journey, I see how one-on-one dialogues can ignite positive change. Roundtables turned principles into prototypes; and now, through training and UN-wide forums, I hope to help ensure that data-driven decisions are guided by integrity and inclusivity. As my internship concludes, I remain grateful for the opportunity to lay groundwork that will carry the ILO, and the UN family, forward – ensuring AI-driven insights uphold dignity, equity and sustainable development for all. //

- 1 *NLP-driven refers to something powered or guided by Natural Language Processing (NLP), a technology that helps computers understand, interpret, and respond to human language.*
- 2 *A labour market information system is a network of institutions, persons and information that have mutually-recognized roles, agreements and functions with respect to the production, storage, dissemination and use of labour-market related information and results. This is to maximise the potential for relevant and applicable policy and programme formulation and implementation.*
- 3 *Text mining refers to the process of extracting meaningful patterns, insights, or information from large amounts of text data using computational techniques.*
- 4 *Gather data automatically means the system pulls in new information on its own without manual input.*
- 5 *Regional bias refers to when data from some areas is over- or under-represented, making the picture unfair or unbalanced.*
- 6 *Flag unusual figures means the AI highlights data points that look very different from the norm, so analysts can check if they are errors or important exceptions.*
- 7 *Prompt engineering refers to the practice of crafting and refining the input text (the "prompt") given to an AI model, to guide it toward producing more accurate, relevant, or creative responses.*

Yunxiang Guo at International Labour Organization Headquarters, May 2025

Tackling the Global Obesity pandemic

THE WHO ACCELERATION PLAN TO STOP OBESITY

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WHO
acceleration
plan to stop
obesity



Delivering
impact for
health



The global obesity pandemic has reached a tipping point, with over 1 billion people affected as of 2022 and surpassing earlier projections by nearly a decade. In response, WHO has launched the Acceleration Plan to Stop Obesity, a comprehensive initiative aimed at transforming how countries confront this escalating health and economic threat. By combining political engagement, evidence-based interventions and a rigorous implementation framework, the plan offers a new, actionable path forward to reverse obesity trends and protect public health.

The WHO's Acceleration Plan to Stop Obesity mobilizes 34 countries in a coordinated, evidence-driven effort to halt the rising obesity rates through policy reform, accountability, and cross-sector collaboration. This scalable model offers a blueprint for tackling other global health challenges with impact and urgency.

With the news that the number of people living with obesity surpassed 1 billion in 2022, the world has already exceeded previous worst-case predictions for the trajectory of obesity by more than eight years. The health risks associated with obesity are significant, including heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers. Affecting more people than HIV, tuberculosis and malaria combined, and with the numbers rising in every country in the world, the implications of obesity for global health and nutrition are huge and demand a response of equal magnitude. The economic impact is also substantial, with costs expected to reach US\$ 3 trillion per year by 2030.

In response to this pandemic, the WHO launched the Acceleration Plan to Stop Obesity in 2022. The Acceleration Plan is transforming the prospects of success by adopting a systematic approach across three key pillars for policy change implementation: shaping the political environment to generate impetus for change; creating a platform for delivery and implementation; and strengthening accountability.

Endorsed at the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly in 2022, the Acceleration Plan focuses

on one ambitious goal: to stop the rising obesity pandemic.

To date, 34 countries have taken the lead as “front-runner countries” agreeing to work with WHO and our implementation partners such as UNICEF and the World Bank as a vanguard group around implementation of the plan at country level.

All countries in the frontrunner group are following the same operational methodology applied in the Acceleration Plan. This methodology provides a systematic process to support countries towards implementation and impact. It blends national health sector planning and policy making with implementation and delivery science using WHO's Delivery for Impact methodology, which is characterized by the use of policy and impact cycles to set goals, track progress, make course corrections, and redesign when needed to ensure targets are achieved. Additionally, it uses simplified indicators and employs pragmatic accountability rubrics for national and global reporting. The methodology for the Acceleration Plan, designed based on the WHO Implementation.

The Acceleration Plan is structured around WHO's new technical package to stop obesity, the ACT package, which presents evidence-based priority policy actions with their recommended policy interventions to transform strategic areas that will attack obesity as a public health issue.

In a global context of competing priorities and scarce resources, a change of approach is needed to unlock decisive action that can curb obesity rates. Prevention and control of obesity necessitate multi-sectoral policies and actions and a whole-of-society approach. A balance must nevertheless be sought between recognition of the multiple causal factors and the efficacy of focused action on a selected menu of evidence-based interventions that can accelerate impact in the short and medium term.

The significance of the Acceleration Plan is in the shift, it represents from the focus on “what” to a new and rigorous focus on “how” to stem the tide of obesity. In just two years, the 34 frontrunner countries have developed their obesity pandemic

TEXT MELANIE BERTRAM, RUPASREE SRIKUMAR, DIANA ESTEVEZ FERNANDEZ,
FRANCESCA CELLETTI AND JØRGEN TORGERTUEN JOHNSEN, WHO
PHOTO ISTOCK



response acceleration roadmaps and countries are now moving to implementation, with mid-term (2025) and long-term (2030) delivery points. National-level indicators are keeping momentum and focus during implementation. This already represents a sea change in policy implementation around the globe.

The urgency around obesity is now spurring an acceleration of scientific development, with new medicines emerging to manage obesity and lower cardiovascular risk. For example, the use of glucagon-like peptide-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1 RAs), a class of medications used to treat type 2 diabetes, has recently been approved for the treatment of obesity. Use of this class of medications is one of many new tools that can be used as additional, not stand-alone, solutions as part of a comprehensive and multimodal therapeutic approach to manage obesity. In addition, health and life insurance companies are starting to incorporate the prevention and management of obesity in their packages, while industries are establishing workplace programmes to prevent and manage obesity and provide access to healthy diets, promote physical activity, and foster mental well-being.

The Acceleration Plan is demonstrating proof of concept as a means to unlock action. It has achieved this by drilling down to the granularity that can support execution and progress, using an evidence-based approach to advocacy, implementation, and accountability. This involves

demanding tailored interventions, strengthening capacity, creating an enabling environment and generating a catalytic effect through securing political engagement and fostering a community of practice for cross-country learning. However, this recipe for success must now be propelled forward at speed and scale. Most importantly, we need to monitor the implementation and impact of these measures.

In conclusion, the WHO Acceleration Plan to Stop Obesity is a comprehensive strategy to address the obesity pandemic. By focusing on political commitment, effective implementation, and accountability, the plan is already driving meaningful change in 34 countries, with significant potential for further impact as more countries join the effort. The involvement of communities and use of innovative approaches that blend policy-making with evidence-based interventions are key to its success. This model, built on shared learning, strategic alignment, and measurable progress, offers a powerful blueprint that can be replicated in other areas of public health. Whether addressing mental health, infectious diseases, or climate change, the principles behind the Acceleration Plan – targeted action, accountability, and a commitment to long-term outcomes—are universally applicable. If countries around the world come together to embrace this holistic approach, we can tackle not just obesity but a wide range of public health issues, creating a healthier, more resilient future for all. //

Taking the first step towards tackling obesity:
Measuring progress in the fight for better health.

Creating a Lasting Public Health Legacy Through Safer Mass Gatherings

FROM THE OLYMPIC GAMES TO RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGES, WHO HELPS ENSURE THE WORLD'S BIGGEST EVENTS LEAVE BEHIND HEALTHIER SYSTEMS – NOT JUST HEADLINES.

When global crowds gather – whether for sport, faith, or celebration – protecting public health becomes critical to ensuring the event's success. From the Olympics, Hajj to many other types of events, mass gatherings bring millions together, creating opportunities for shared joy, but also for the risk of spreading disease. That's where the World Health Organization (WHO) steps in.

In recent years, WHO has worked behind the scenes to help countries host safer, healthier large-scale events. This work was formally recognized when the International Olympic Committee awarded WHO and its Director-General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus two Olympic Awards, honouring their role in safely delivering the Tokyo 2020 and Beijing 2022 Olympic Games amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Did you know?

WHO supported over 40 major international events in the last decade – from religious pilgrimages to music festivals."

WHY MASS GATHERINGS MATTER FOR HEALTH SYSTEMS

Mass gatherings are more than momentary risks—they are stress tests for national health systems. These high-visibility events compress time, scale, and complexity, requiring a level of planning akin to that of public health emergencies.

They also offer a unique opportunity to leave lasting public health legacies: stronger surveillance, enhanced emergency response capacity, and community engagement strategies that endure long after the final whistle or prayer.

WHO's support for countries in planning and delivering these events is anchored in the International Health Regulations (2005)—a legally bind-

ing framework that guides countries in preventing, detecting, and responding to public health threats, including those arising in the context of international mass gatherings.

The key discussion on this topic commenced at the 130th Session of the WHO Executive Board, where Member States endorsed the importance of addressing "*Global mass gatherings: implications and opportunities for global health security*." In 2024, Member States advanced this agenda further through the adoption of the resolution "*Strengthening health and well-being through sport events*," requesting WHO to provide technical guidance and promote legacy-building through high-visibility events.

FROM PREPARATION TO LEGACY: WHO'S SUPPORT IN ACTION

WHO supports mass gatherings through every phase – before, during, and after – to ensure public health systems are prepared, responsive, and leave a lasting legacy.

Before the Event: Anticipating Risks and Strengthening Systems

- **Risk Assessments:** helps host countries conduct all-hazard assessments to identify threats and apply precautionary measures to make events safer.
- **Surveillance Preparedness:** supports countries in strengthening event-based surveillance for early detection of public health signals.
- **Evidence-Based Emergency Planning:** assists in establishing emergency medical response plans, including outbreak control, infection prevention and control, vaccination strategies, trained rapid response teams, and protocols for safe evacuation and referral.
- **Participant Health Guidance:** helps develop public health information for attendees – including on vaccinations, hygiene, food/water safety, and emergency contacts.

During the Event: Coordinating and Responding in Real Time

- **Live Coordination and Intelligence Sharing:** facilitates real-time information exchange among host governments, event organizers, and global partners to track and manage emerging health issues.
- **Rapid Risk Assessment and Technical Support:** deploys public health experts rapidly to conduct on-site risk assessments, support containment efforts, and advise national authorities in case of health alerts or outbreaks.

After the Event: Capturing Lessons and Building Legacy

- **Evaluation and Legacy Documentation:** promotes post-event reviews to capture lessons learned, improve preparedness, and embed new health capacities into national systems.
- **Promoting Healthy Lifestyles:** Supports campaigns encouraging physical activity, disease prevention, and healthy behaviors.

CASE IN POINT: THE FIFA WORLD CUP QATAR 2022

In collaboration with FIFA, Qatar's Ministry of Public Health and the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, WHO launched the "*Sport for Health*" initiative (officially known as the "Healthy FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 - Creating a Legacy for Sport and Health") to protect the health of all participants while leveraging the visibility of the tournament to promote healthier lifestyles and build a public health legacy.

The project was anchored in four main pillars:

- Protecting health through public health systems (e.g., disease surveillance, social listening)
- Promoting health via physical activity, healthy diets, and tobacco cessation
- Providing health through responsive health-care systems, ensuring readiness to manage mass gathering health needs
- Advocacy and awareness-raising to embed health into major sporting events

With 1.4 million visitors from 177 countries, the 2022 World Cup was a logistical and public health challenge unlike any other. It was the first World Cup held during an ongoing global pandemic, took place in the respiratory illness peak season, and was hosted across venues concentrated within a single metropolitan area – a first in the tournament's history.

Despite these complexities, WHO and partners implemented large-scale public health measures, and monitored and documented all activities throughout the event. Reflections on the key achievements, challenges, and lessons learned have since been

published to inform the planning and delivery of future mass gatherings. The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 transformed into more than a sporting spectacle—it became a platform for lasting public health impact.

Today, the Sport for Health model serves as a benchmark for multisectoral collaboration, uniting public health, sport federations, and host governments to deliver safer, healthier, and more impactful global events.

NEW TOOLS FOR A NEW ERA

As mass gatherings grow in scale, frequency, and complexity, so must the tools and strategies evolve to manage them. In response to growing demand from countries and organizers, WHO has developed a suite of practical, evidence-based tools to strengthen preparedness, improve coordination, and ensure the health and safety of both participants and host communities. These tools help countries move from reactive response to proactive, risk-based planning, laying the foundation for safer, more resilient events worldwide.

PUBLISHED

- **Global Risk Assessment Web Tool** – Developed with Johns Hopkins University, this digital platform helps countries identify vulnerabilities and plan tailored responses.
- **WHO Global Mass Gathering Intelligence Platform** – A knowledge-sharing hub connecting event organizers, health authorities, and WHO experts.
- **Public Health for Mass Gatherings: Key Considerations**

UPCOMING

- **Mass Gathering Medical Care Planning Guidance** – A comprehensive framework to mitigate health risks and ensure medical readiness.
- **RCCE Toolkit for Mass Gatherings** – A guide to effective community engagement and public health messaging.
- **Mass Gathering SimEx and AAR Guide** – Helps countries conduct simulations and evaluations to boost readiness.

LOOKING FORWARD: FROM SUPPORT TO SUSTAINABILITY

Mass gatherings offer a unique opportunity to turn temporary health measures into permanent progress. Whether in the stadium, on the streets, or at a sacred site, WHO's goal is to ensure every crowd leaves more than memories – a stronger, safer, healthier system for all. //

Interested in Leadership Gym? Visit Toastmasters!

INTERVIEW WITH DISTINGUISHED TOASTMASTER STEFANO MCGHEE,
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT OF TOASTMASTERS; SENIOR DIRECTOR
OF TECHNOLOGY OPERATION OF HARVARD BUSINESS PUBLISHING



TEXT YOKO OWATARI, UN GENEVA TOASTMASTERS
PHOTO NINA LINDSAY VON JULIN

For two decades, Stefano McGhee has been at the heart of Toastmasters International, the century-old nonprofit organisation dedicated to honing leadership and public speaking skills. From a first-time speaker to First Vice President of the global organisation, McGhee's journey embodies the transformative power of the Toastmasters experience.

A GLOBAL CLASSROOM FOR LEADERSHIP

"Toastmasters offers the ability to work across borders," McGhee says. With clubs in more than 140 countries, the organisation demands its members learn not just to speak, but to connect. "You're dealing with different personalities and cultures. To lead, you have to understand what drives people."

The essence of successful leadership, he adds, lies in listening. "Not just to hear someone talk, but to understand their position. Every successful Toastmasters leader learns to ask: 'Why do you feel that way? What life experiences shape your thinking?'"

McGhee describes this as building consensus from shared values. "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good," he emphasises. He emphasises the importance of starting from a point where both sides can agree and then incorporating as many ideas as possible from minor groups.

WHEN LEADERSHIP HURTS

That mindset helped McGhee through a difficult phase in his corporate role, when he had to lead a significant workforce reduction. *"Giving constructive feedback, something I learned in Toastmasters, helped me navigate that,"* he says. Another moment came when his team resisted a directive from upper management. After weeks of trying to build consensus, McGhee realised it was time to be direct. *"It hurt because I hadn't used that 'authoritarian muscle' before,"* he recalls. *"But Toastmasters is a leadership gym. All leadership styles have their place - yes, all of them. You learn when and how to use every style."*

INFLUENCE OVER AUTHORITY

Among McGhee's core leadership lessons: you can't please everyone, leadership is more about influence than authority, and again—don't let perfect be the enemy of good. He recalls leading Toastmasters club officer training plans for a few thousand members. His team stalled, overwhelmed by the scale of improvements needed. *"I said, we don't need the perfect plan. Let's act. Start small, learn, adjust. That's how we finally moved faster than we imagined."*

He advocates for "small wins" – a steady stream of incremental changes. *"Big changes take 18 months. But members need to see progress now. Small changes show movement and build morale."*

WHY HE STAYED 20 YEARS

McGhee joined Toastmasters to become a better speaker, inspired by the eloquence of Barack Obama. But it's the joy of helping others that has kept him in the organisation for two decades. *"I love watching members grow. I started helping in my club and district. Now, I have the privilege to do that globally. That's what keeps me coming back."*

At club level, McGhee says, you see the direct impact of your efforts. But challenges are personal too—conflicts can sink clubs. At the district level, the scale changes. *"One of my favourite roles was Area Director. You connect clubs, help members build friendships of coffee-lovers and motor-cyclists - and friendships keep people engaged."*

Internationally, the issues become more complex, including tax law, litigation, and nonprofit policy. But the goal remains the same: *"Give members an experience they enjoy. Retain them. Help them grow personally and create community."*

He recounts attending a district conference in Europe after the pandemic. *"There were photos of people laughing, hugging, crying. That joy? Leaders made it happen. That's real impact."*



As a working ambassador for Toastmasters, DTM Stefano McGhee continuously inspires people around the world.



Still, balance is key. *"Toastmasters should be third: after your family and your job. If you lose to this organisation, you're no good to us."*

McGhee blocks time meticulously, even for personal moments. *"Calendar management is a critical skill. Everything goes on the calendar – time for yourself, family, friends and for work."* I've had to put some of my hobbies, such as motorcycle riding, boating, and flying, on hold for a little while, but not all of them.

LEARN +

Toastmasters International



UN Geneva Toastmasters



Local clubs in the francophone region



He recalls a moment at a recent District Contest he attended. *"The contest master was juggling too much. I started handing out awards quietly. He was shocked. 'You're the First Vice President!' he said. I replied, 'It doesn't matter. Somebody should be here to support you and your success right now. I hope you do that for somebody else.'"* Stefano derives warmth and a sense of joy from helping others achieve their goals by simply doing what they need to do to be successful.

"If I could go back to my first day of visiting a Toastmaster club, I'd tell myself: don't hesitate to step into leadership. But never forget why members join – to grow." McGhee never imagined being an international officer. *"The focus must always be on members. You can't please everyone, but do your best to build shared values and let everyone be heard, even when it's painful to do so. You'll do all right with those people because they never forget that you listened."*

BALANCING FAMILY, CAREER, AND TOASTMASTERS

Managing a senior leadership job, family life, and Toastmasters commitments requires buy-in. *"My wife is a Toastmaster too, so she understands what's involved, and she was always there to help me get through the challenges,"* he says. His son showed up to help out. His previous manager at work was equally supportive, viewing Toastmasters as *"free leadership training"* and trusting him in his work and Toastmasters endeavours.

WHAT HE READS AND RECOMMENDS

He recommends *Start With Why* by Simon Sinek to understand personal motivation. For those in board service, HBR's 10 Must Reads on Boards and Harvard Business Review's articles on boards and diversity are essential reads. *"Boards shape the organisation's direction. Understanding diversity and purpose is crucial."*

THE FUTURE IS AI-ENHANCED

Looking ahead, McGhee sees artificial intelligence as an essential partner, not a threat. *"Imagine practising your speech with AI at midnight when everyone's asleep. You get feedback on mechanics. Then you bring it to the club for human judgment on your content and delivery."* Toastmasters, he says, should integrate AI tools to enhance learning and improve outcomes. *"AI will never replace Toastmasters, but it can help members improve faster. In five years, this partnership will be critical."*

PROUD MOMENTS

McGhee's proudest moments come when others rise. As a District Director, he once delegated a complex club realignment project to a hesitant Division leader. *"She delivered a better solution than I would've. She later ran for a higher position in our District."*

Helping others succeed, he says, is the heart of leadership. *"When someone says, 'You believed in me, so I tried,' that's everything." //*

The Coherence Imperative

RENEWING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH DEMOCRATIC CONSENT



Our research shows that sustainable globalization is possible when three elements converge: deliberative institutions, transparent trade-off mechanisms, and inclusive processes that align diverse interests. The benefits of economic openness are fully realized only when social dialogue advances market efficiency, policy effectiveness, and distributive equity—forming a self-reinforcing compass for just and coherent development.

RECLAIMING THE PROMISE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

As the world converges on Geneva for the 113th Session of the International Labour Conference (ILC) and looks ahead to the 2025 World Social Summit, the message from the International Labour Organization (ILO) could not be clearer: re-aligning economic policy with social justice is an imperative not an option. In his latest report, *Jobs, Rights and Growth: Reinforcing the Connection*, Director-General Gilbert F. Hounbo emphasizes that the nexus of decent work, fundamental rights, and economic development must be re-structured through inclusive institutions and democratic values.

The global disillusionment with the current state of work – marked by precarious employment, stagnant wages, and weakened labour rights – is not merely an economic issue, but a political crisis of legitimacy. This crisis speaks to deeper questions: Can globalization be governed justly? Are our systems designed to include, protect, and empower? And if not, how can we rebuild them?

At the heart of the ILO's response is a constitutional mandate that affirms lasting peace is based upon social justice. The Preamble of the ILO Constitution, echoed in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia, demands that economic and financial policies be judged by whether they promote fairness, inclusion, and dignity. The 2026–2029 Strategic Plan reinforces this by calling for a renewed social contract anchored in the Decent Work Agenda – addressing persistent deficits in social justice while fostering resilience and cooperation.

Yet this call requires more than vision; it requires measurement. As the Director-General writes, the real challenge lies in making democratic participation and institutional trust central to the growth–jobs–rights triangle. That calls into question the prevailing metrics of success.

BEYOND GDP: RECLAIMING METRICS FOR JUSTICE

For decades, GDP has been treated as a proxy for progress. But GDP does not capture unpaid labour, the erosion of rights, or the long-term costs of inequality. It offers little insight into whether growth is inclusive or sustainable. The Director-General's report rightly questions this orthodoxy. New indicators are needed – ones that reflect not just economic output, but whether societies are fulfilling their commitment to decent work, shared prosperity, and democratic participation.

This is where our new approach – the Geneva Consensus –, gains traction. It offers a politically grounded framework for justice-based evaluation, combining James Buchanan's theory of democratic consent with the empirical robustness of Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA), which allows policymakers to measure institutional performance without compromising on equity.

PARETO OPTIMALITY AS DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY

James Buchanan, in *The Calculus of Consent*, argued that legitimate public policies are those capable of commanding unanimous agreement, and consent because they do not impose harm on any participant. This logic forms the foundation of his public choice theory and serves as a guiding principle for democratic governance. His reinterpretation of Pareto optimality – typically seen as a measure of efficiency – frames it instead as a procedural criterion of justice. A policy is just if it makes at least one person better off without making anyone else worse off. In this framework, consensus is not merely aspirational; it is the foundation of democratic governance. Empirically derived group consensus lays political grounds for legitimately forging a social contract.

TEXT DR. RUZANNA TARVERDYAN, MEMBER OF GENEVA CITY MUNICIPAL COUNCIL,
AN AWARD-WINNING CO-AUTHOR OF MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
PERFORMANCE, FOUNDING PRESIDENT OF THE GENEVA CONSENSUS FOUNDATION

This procedural standard resists coercion and affirms fairness. When embedded in institutional design, Pareto optimality filters out exploitative reforms and ensures that progress is not achieved at the expense of dignity. It invites a powerful re-framing of justice: not as a static distribution of goods, but as a dynamic process grounded in voluntary agreement, equality, and non-domination. This approach has direct implications for both national and international governance, particularly in settings where traditional democratic mechanisms are under pressure or erosion.

DATA ENVELOPMENT ANALYSIS: FROM CONSENT TO EVIDENCE

To bring this principle into policymaking, Buchanan's logic must be translated into practice. That is where DEA plays a central role. Originally developed to evaluate the efficiency of public service delivery, DEA assesses how well institutions convert inputs (resources, policies, infrastructure) into desirable outputs (employment, social protection, wage equality).

DEA identifies performance frontiers based on context. It reveals where governments or sectors are making the most effective and efficient use of resources – and where others can improve without replicating harm.

Crucially, all DEA-generated solutions are Pareto optimal. This means DEA provides not only evidence of institutional performance but also a justice-based assurance that no group is made worse off. It becomes a practical test for justice, fairness and legitimacy.

As the Director-General notes, today's polycrisis demands not just stronger policies, but institutions that restore trust and shared purpose. DEA supports that goal by offering a participatory decision making tool that governments and social partners can use to co-design reforms and measure progress collaboratively. It transforms abstract commitments to inclusion and equity into trackable progress.

THE 3^E FRAMEWORK: EFFECTIVENESS, EFFICIENCY, EQUITY

To operationalize this model, the Geneva Consensus applies the 3^E Framework:

- Effectiveness: Are we achieving what we set out to do?
- Efficiency: Are we using resources intelligently and with minimal waste?
- Equity: Are gains shared fairly across groups and generations?

This triad becomes a compass for justice-based governance. It allows policymakers to simulate trade-offs, diagnose shortcomings, and align reforms with the principles of fairness and democratic accountability. The 3^E Framework enables development partners to assess policy coherence across all three dimensions and course-correct when needed. It also fosters innovation by illuminating new pathways to balance social ambition with economic reality.

A PATH FORWARD FOR THE ILO

The ILO's current agenda is an invitation to reimagine good governance for policy coherence and the SDGs. The Global Coalition for Social Justice provides the institutional architecture for this, bringing together governments, workers, employers, and civil society to act collectively. But to be effective, such collaboration must rest on measurable legitimacy.

The Geneva Consensus framework responds to this need by operationalizing the principle of consent. Rather than applying uniform metrics, it empowers each stakeholder to determine whether its policies promote justice, inclusion, and sustainability. This contributes directly to restoring institutional trust – one of the core concerns raised by the Director-General and foster a global economy that delivers for people.

This direction signals a promising evolution in multilateralism: from declarations to demonstrable accountability, from structural inertia to responsive, context-aware institutions. The ILO has both the historical credibility and the operational reach to lead this shift – and to ground the next generation of global labour policy in both evidence and ethics.

CONCLUSION: FROM METRICS TO MANDATES

The future of work will be shaped not only by economic forces, but by the policy and institutional choices we make. If peace is rooted in justice, and justice is conditional on consent, then our policy tools must reflect this chain of legitimacy.

By aligning Buchanan's consent-based theory with DEA's evaluative methodology, the Geneva Consensus advances a practical model for justice-based global governance. This approach answers the ILO's constitutional mandate to promote social justice and coherence in global labour policy – ensuring that jobs, rights, and growth move forward in unison, not in tension towards universal and lasting peace. //

International Law “à la carte”

THE ESSENCE OF THE RULE OF LAW IS THE UNIFORM
APPLICATION OF NORMS: SELECTIVITY AND DOUBLE STANDARDS
SUBVERT LAW AND CIVILIZATION



International law cannot be applied selectively or à la carte, today this way, tomorrow differently or not at all. In some cases, violations of international law are loudly denounced by the United Nations, by governments, by non-governmental organizations. In other circumstances, comparable or even more serious violations of law are followed by deafening silence. Indeed, the “crime of silence” implies tacit consent. Qui tacet consentire videtur. Individuals and States can thereby become complicit in the crime, if not legally, certainly morally.

Experience in the United Nations and elsewhere demonstrates that international law suffers from a severe case of double standards, both in its interpretation and application. As a consequence, the authority and credibility of the institutions concerned continue to suffer an erosion of public trust. It will not be easy to regain the trust that has been lost.

The UN Charter binds all States and peoples. International treaties, whether bilateral or multilateral, bind the States parties and should be applied *in good faith* according to the principle *pacta sunt servanda* (Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, article 26). Whereas human rights are juridical, justiciable and, in principle, enforceable, the United Nations General Assembly and the Human Rights Council have a track record of applying international law in an egregiously selective manner. This has been possible because of the complicity of the mainstream media that deliberately weaponizes human rights to demonize some countries while engaging in fulsome apologetics for the crimes of certain other countries. The debates in the GA and HR Council are characterized by political instrumentalization of the facts and by what I would call “*fake law*”, since many diplomats invent “*the law*” as they go along. I repeat – we are not only facing a crisis of “*fake news*” and suppression of opposing narratives, we are in the quagmire of fake history and pseudo-legal narratives that may sound OK to the layman, but that even a first year law student would reject as political nonsense narrative.

If the “*doctrine*” of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) means anything (GA Resolution 60/1 of 24 October 2005, paragraphs 138-9), then it should have been invoked decades ago in the context of the Israeli denial of the right of self-determination of the Palestinian People, in the context of mass evictions, arrests, expulsions and ethnic cleansing, in the context of systematic humiliation and Apartheid policies against the native Palestinians. R2P should have been invoked to demand the immediate implementation of the Advisory Opinions of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004 and 19 July 2024.

But not only in Israel, R2P should have invoked to protect the lives and properties of 140,000 Armenians of Nagorno Karabagh (Republic of Artsakh) whose ancestors have lived there since millennia. R2P could have prevented the massacres and ethnic cleansing unfolding there since 2020. Like the Israeli government, the Azerbaijani and Turkish governments have enjoyed impunity and an almost complete indifference from the international community and the media.

R2P should have been applied on behalf of the Sahraouis of Western Sahara, the Tamils of Sri Lanka, the Igbos and Ogonis of Nigeria, the Mapuche of Chile. The *jus cogens* right of self-determination of peoples is granted to some, denied to others.

Without a doubt, many politicians today deserve being indicted and prosecuted by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Surely those guilty of the crimes of aggression, war crimes and crimes against humanity in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Notwithstanding compelling legal briefs filed with the ICC Prosecutor since 2004, no one was ever indicted. An investigation started by Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda into US and NATO Crimes in Afghanistan was terminated by her successor Karim Khan. Over a period of 23 years since its establishment in 2002, the ICC has displayed a certain bias, indicted Africans, and enemies of the US and EU including Vladimir Putin. That is why it was comparable to



an earthquake when Prosecutor Khan asked for arrest warrants against Israeli and Hamas leaders. This may eventually save the ICC.

A Special Session of the Human Rights Council on the issue of the self-determination of peoples would be appropriate, since the right of self-determination of peoples is *jus cogens*, and millions of human beings in all continents are being denied this right and many killed in the process. It must be well understood that the right of self-determination laid down in Articles 1 and 55 of the UN Charter, in Chapters XI and XII of the Charter, in common article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is not limited to decolonization, but extends the right to all peoples. States are obliged to pro-actively implement this right. All peoples are rights holders. As I proposed in my 2013 report to the General Assembly, the United Nations should accept petitions from all peoples deprived of self-determination, those living under foreign occupation, those enduring Apartheid, etc. Among the many aspirants to self-determination, we recognize the French of Quebec, the Scots, the Catalans, the Corsicans, the South Tiroleans, the Kurds, the West Papuans, the Rapa Nui, the native population of Hawaii, the indigenous peoples of Alaska and those living in “reservations” in the United States.

Politicians have forgotten what the former Director-General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor Zaragoza, said at the 1998 UNESCO consultation in Barcelona, namely that the realization of the right of self-determination of peoples is an effective conflict-prevention strategy. Indeed, so many wars since the 1945 had their origin in the unjust denial of this right. The level of hypocrisy of politicians and media alike is frightening. Hitherto the United Nations organs have failed to ensure that all peoples enjoy this right. And sometimes it seems like the United Nations has learned to live with endemic double standards.

We must demand an end to these gross violations of human dignity and pave the way to reconstruction and reconciliation. Priorities are crucial in all human endeavors. What is on the agenda? What is being discussed, what is being deliberately ignored? Politics can and should be ethical, but most of the time it is amoral, short-sighted and falsely utilitarian. At least in democracies the electorate can demand ethics and justice, but the media will do its utmost to brainwash the public into believing fake news, fake history and fake law.

Progress and retrogression characterize the history of international law and human rights. Today the world is in chaos, but not more so than in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. At least we are not burning witches or massacring indigenous Hopi, Sioux and

The rule of law (*dura lex sed lex*) is corrupted by the lawyers themselves (*summum jus, summa injuria*).
What we demand instead is the rule of justice.

Tainos, Arawacs, Quechia – the slave trade is abolished, colonialism is drastically reduced. We have seen a phenomenal codification of legal norms, the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Covenants, the establishment of regional human rights courts. We hail the growing recognition of the rights of half the population of the planet – women, the measures taken on behalf of persons with disabilities. We welcome the gradual abolition of the cruelty of “capital punishment”. Yet, there is also significant retrogression in many fields, including the erosion of the concept of Peace as a Human Right, the backsliding from General Assembly Resolution 39/11 of 1984. Today there is scarce protection of the right to know, the right to access truthful information, the right to freedom of opinion and expression. We see censorship by governments and the private sector, the blocking of RT and Sputnik by the EU, the Orwellian new Digital Services Act, the brazen indoctrination practiced by the media, the excesses of “cancel culture”, the epidemic of self-censorship, the social acceptance of Islamophobia, Russophobia and Sinophobia, the crimes committed against 25 million victims of human trafficking, including 3.4 million children. Serious retrogression is evident in the weakened protection of family life and family values, the attacks on the concept of the family and parental authority, the denigration and ridicule of religious beliefs.

Retrogression is also apparent in the practices of institutions established to protect our rights. Many institutions have been hijacked for geopolitical and ideological purposes. *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* (Juvenalis, 6th Satire, verses 347-48) Who guards over the guardians? Institutions such as the UN Human Rights Council, ECHR, IACHR, OPCW often let themselves be hijacked by major powers and thus betray their mandates, weaponizing human rights instead of devising preventive strategies and mechanisms to secure

human dignity. *Only we can be the guardians.* While we realize that governments and the media lie to us on a daily basis, that they suppress crucial information we, as citizens of democratic countries, must push back and reclaim democracy. We do not need any Ministry of Truth as in 1984. But are we not already in the dystopia of Huxley's *Brave New World*?

Among the gravest instances of retrogression is the obsession with punishment, that self-righteousness that invites us to lapidate the adulteress, the arrogance of “lawfare” against dissidents. If Christianity taught us anything, it is that we must forgive to be forgiven: *et dimite nobis debita nostra sicut et nos dimitimus debitoribus nostris*. Yet, the mainstream ngo's have transformed “amnesty” into a curse word, as they have transformed “appeasement” into an insult, although in the nuclear age the only rational approach to conflict-prevention is confidence-building, engaging in dialogue, building bridges, creating the conditions for peace. *Si vis pacem, para pacem* (if we want peace, we must create the conditions for peace and proactively appease). Amnesties are not bad per se. Sometimes amnesties can pave the way to reconciliation. Revenge is incompatible with the *acquis* of civilization. Punishment is not a wise or civilized answer to problems. The ICC has a purpose, but we must guard that it remain professional and that it does not replace the imperative of prevention by the false hope of “deterrence” and the toxic satisfaction of revenge instincts.

Knowledge of the root causes of conflict facilitates the prevention of war, the prevention of violations of human rights. We need to proactively wage peace, develop the faculty of self-criticism so as to correct our own mistakes before we go around pointing fingers at others. We must practice international solidarity, applying international law in good faith and not *à la carte*. //

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The Technological Predictions of George Orwell

GEORGE ORWELL PREDICTED MODERN GYMS, FLATPACK FURNITURE AND FAST-FOOD, AS LONG AGO AS 1937.



George Orwell is the prescient English author famous for his social conscience and predictive powers, most well-known for his novels '1984' and 'Animal Farm'. But did you know that he also predicted modern gyms, flatpack furniture and industrially-produced fast food?

If you have heard of the famous English author George Orwell, it is most probably for his allegorical novel 'Animal Farm' or the dystopian vision presented in his novel '1984', which highlighted the tendency of a government to start engaging in 'spin' and propaganda. He introduced powerful new terms into the British mindset and outlook, including 'newspeak', 'Big Brother', 'doublethink' and 'crimethink'. In my attempt to read some of the non-fiction works of George Orwell (aka Eric Blair), I was therefore amazed to find some decidedly non-fictional predictions in 'The Road to Wigan Pier', his amazingly frank account of the living conditions of the working-class in the industrial towns of Wigan, Sheffield and Barnsley in the mid-1930s.

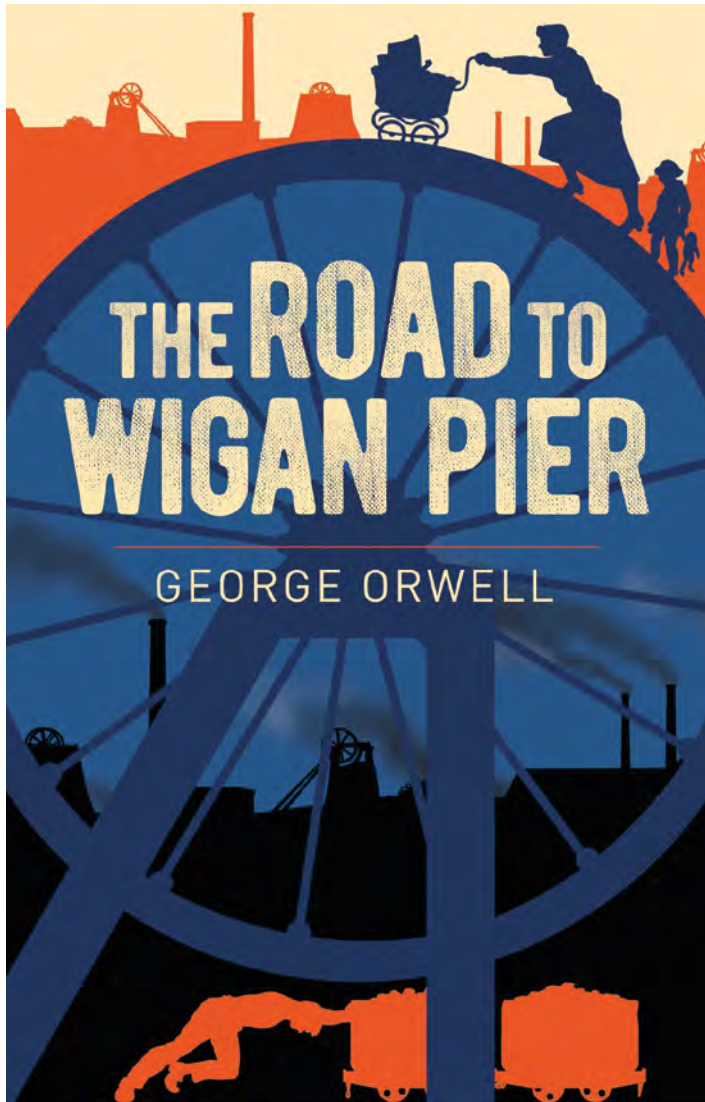
This book was commissioned by the publisher Victor Gollancz as part of a tradition of 'condition of the country' books in the 1930s, examining different angles of English society. However, with this book, Orwell's publisher got more than he bargained for! Part I reads like a documentary exploration of living conditions in several northern industrial towns, including a trip down a coal mine, accounts of wages and descriptions of food and accommodation. Tragically, many of the themes of poverty, unemployment, poor-quality social housing and low social standing still remain relevant today.

In Part II, George Orwell explains his personal interest in the condition of the working class and seeks to justify his view that socialism could help improve living conditions in Britain. This section is intriguing, partly due to its auto-biographical elements, as well as its insightful comments about English social class structure. At that time, advocating socialism was considered relatively controversial in a country such as England, 'a nation of shopkeepers' with its merchant navy and overseas colonies.

However, in Chapter 12, I was especially struck by George Orwell's discussion of machine means of production, and some of his questions, observations and future predictions remain relevant to us today. His insights range from big-picture questions to pointed suggestions about where machines might take us.

George Orwell's first question is, "we need to ask, what is the function of the machine?" He answers this directly: "Obviously, its primary function is to save work" (p.184). This may well still be true today, but we have by now added in many other functions as well - to entertain, communicate, distract, research, learn, surprise, amaze, publish and impress, to name but a few...

According to what Orwell calls almost religiously, 'machine-worship' (p.185), 'machines, our new race of slaves, will set humanity free' (p.186). His first observation is that "the tendency of machines is to make your environment safe and soft; and yet you are striving to keep yourself brave and hard" (p.187). He suggests that, "in tying yourself to the ideal of machine efficiency, you tie yourself to the ideal of softness" (p.189). Orwell suggests that "presumably the inhabitants of Utopia would create artificial dangers to exercise their courage, and do dumb-bell exercises to harden muscles they would never have to use" (p.187).... He is essentially foreseeing the need for office workers to work out regularly in a gym!



George Orwell's investigation of the conditions of the English working class contains so much more.

Orwell observes that *"it sounds splendid to replace half a dozen sweating men digging a trench for a waterpipe, when a machine could do so in a few minutes"*. This leads him to ask his second question, *"but what else are the workers supposed to do?"*. He answers that supposedly, the men are set free from work to do something that is not work, but what counts as work, or not work?

Orwell observes that *"there is scarcely anything that could not conceivably be done by machine"* (p.190). He gives the example that, for making a table, the *'work is already reduced to driving in a few pegs and using a bit of sandpaper. And... it will be enormously more so in our mechanised future'* (p.191) – he is essentially predicting IKEA flat-pack furniture.

He cites the example of the diminishing taste of food, with reference to apples, cheeses, tinned food and beer. *"Mechanization could never proceed very far while taste, even the taste-buds of the tongue, remain uncorrupted. Mechanization leads to the decay of taste, while the decay of taste leads to demand for machine-made articles and hence to more mechanization, and so a vicious circle is es-*

tablished" (p.197). As anyone who has eaten a fast-food hamburger knows, Orwell is essentially describing fast food.

Orwell acknowledges *"a principle that is not always recognized, although always acted on – as long as the machine is there, one is under an obligation to use it"* (p.192). He gives the example of how express trains have killed the joy of spending days travelling from one place to another. Indeed, there is *"a tendency for the mechanization of the world to proceed as it were automatically, whether we want it or not"* (p.198).

Rather worryingly, Orwell concludes that *"the machine has got to be accepted, but better to accept it as one accepts a drug"* (p.196) – i.e. with care. *"Like a drug, machines are useful, dangerous and habit-forming. The oftener one returns to it, the tighter its grip becomes"* (p.196). Indeed, with this statement, Orwell might even have foreseen digital addiction.

On one level, how people respond to and adopt machines remains fairly personal (irrespective of whether they work out at the gym, build IKEA furniture or eat fast-food hamburgers!). Some people embrace technology enthusiastically; others achieve a level of technological competence they are happy with; still others may avoid digital services and apps until required to adopt them.

At the social level, the march of technological progress sometimes seems relentless and inexorable. Indeed, *"we are infected with the notion that 'progress' must continue and knowledge must never be suppressed"* (p.200). And as society now struggles to get grips with generative AI, George Orwell's questions and observations from nearly 90 years ago still strike a chord and remain startlingly relevant today. And his powerful insights continue to inform us to this day. //

Doctors for both body & soul

THE ANCIENT GREEKS BELIEVED IN THE HEALING POWER OF BOOKS, SO THEY PLACED AN INSCRIPTION ABOVE THE ENTRANCE TO THE LIBRARY:

"A HEALING PLACE FOR THE SOUL".

WORDS RELEASE FEELINGS THAT ENCOURAGE US TO AWAKEN DORMANT THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCE LIFE BETTER.

TEXT DR IVANA KNEZEVIC, WHO

The Association of Physicians and Writers "VIDAR" was founded in September 2013 with headquarters in Belgrade. It is a non-profit, non-governmental, non-partisan and non-political organization with more than 40 members. The word "VIDAR" comes from the verb "vidati" which means to heal.

This association regularly participate in the spring and autumn Health Festival, help colleagues in organizing promotions, jubilee celebrations, support and advise each other.

The books published by the members of this Association are in the permanent exhibition of the Museum of the Serbian Medical Society in Niš, Serbia. They have received numerous awards and praises for their literary achievements. Most of the members are also members of the Association of Writers of Serbia. Furthermore, they work closely with the Serbian Medical Society. Meetings are regularly held on the last Friday of the month.

The activities that touched my heart are visits to the schools, homes for the elderly and hospitals. These are the opportunities for poetry reading followed by the music, discussion about literature and many interesting topics about life, health, well-being and other themes of common interest. These gatherings have a healing effect on all involved and is showing the importance of the informal exchange between doctors and patients in a friendly environment. In addition, these warm and friendly events also have an educational aspect where difficult topics about health and diseases are shared in a humorous way.

Medical doctors, writers, in the world are welcome to join this Association. Further information is available at Vidar – Udruženje lekara pisaca.

Three ladies, presidents of the Association of Physicians and Writers "VIDAR" in Belgrade. The initiator for the establishment of the Association and its first president was Dr Radmila Sehic (2013-2017). The second president was Dr Vesna Sekulic (2017-2021) and the third president is Dr Danijela Jevtic (2021-2025). //

LEARN +

Udruženje
lekara pisaca



Unforgettable moments of the poetry reading during the visit of the medical doctors, writers, from the Association "VIDAR" to the primary school "Kosta Abrasevic" in Belgrade. Left to right – seating: Dr Vesna Sekulic, Dr Radmila Sehic, Dr Svetlana Jovic and Dr Danijela Jevtic; standing: honorable member of the Association "VIDAR", Dr Sead Sehic; behind: teacher and pupils of the school.

A photograph of graduates in black gowns and caps. A male graduate in the foreground is smiling broadly and holding a rolled-up diploma tied with a red ribbon. Behind him, a female graduate is also smiling. Other graduates are visible in the background on a paved path with green trees.

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A photograph of a man and a woman hiking in a mountainous area. The woman is wearing an orange beanie and jacket, and the man is wearing a dark jacket. They are both smiling and looking at each other. In the background, there are snow-capped mountains under a clear blue sky.

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Série de timbres 2025

LES ESPÈCES MENACÉES D'EXTINCTION

TEXT GARRY ASLANYAN, WHO

Le 25 avril 2025, l'Administration postale des Nations unies poursuit sa série de timbres sur les espèces menacées d'extinction en émettant douze timbres, trois cartes maximum, une enveloppe en soie à tirage limité, et le dépliant 2025 sur les espèces menacées d'extinction.

Depuis plus de 30 ans, l'APNU émet des timbres en soutien à la CITES (Convention sur le commerce international des espèces de faune et de flore sauvages menacées d'extinction) afin de sensibiliser le public à la multitude d'avantages que la conservation procure aux populations.

La série de timbres des Nations unies sur les espèces menacées d'extinction est constituée d'un éventail d'espèces animales et végétales, provenant de différents groupes taxonomiques et écosystèmes, toutes confrontées à divers défis en matière de conservation.

La série de 2025 célèbre également le trentième anniversaire de l'Accord sur la conservation des oiseaux d'eau migrateurs d'Afrique-Eurasie (AEWA), en présentant l'érismature à tête blanche, le manchot africain et la grue couronnée, qui figurent à la fois dans les annexes de la CITES et sur la liste des espèces de l'AEWA. Cette collaboration souligne l'importance des accords multilatéraux sur l'environnement qui travaillent en complémentarité les uns avec les autres pour atteindre des objectifs communs en matière de biodiversité mondiale. //

LES DESSINS

New York

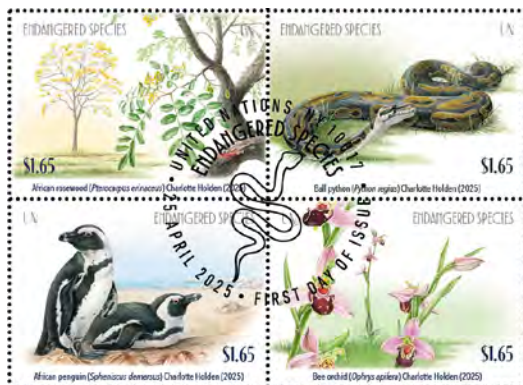
African Rosewood (*Pterocarpus erinaceus*)
African Penguin (*Spheniscus demersus*)
Bee Orchid (*Ophrys apifera*)
Ball Python (*Python regius*)

Genève

Bulnesia Sarmentoi
(*Gonopterodendron sarmientoi*)
Short-snouted seahorse
(*Hippocampus hippocampus*)
Jatamansi (*Nardostachys jatamansi*)
White-headed duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*)

Vienne

Golden root (*Rhodiola rosea*)
Red-eyed treefrog (*Agalychnis callidryas*)
Pygmy hippopotamus (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis*)
Grey-crowned Crane (*Balearica regulorum*)



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Brunel, the Unconventional Engineer

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE LIVING AND WORKING DURING A TIME OF UNPRECEDENTED CHANGE AND CHALLENGES, THE LIFE OF A CERTAIN FRANCO-BRITISH ENGINEER MAY PROVIDE SOME INSPIRATION.



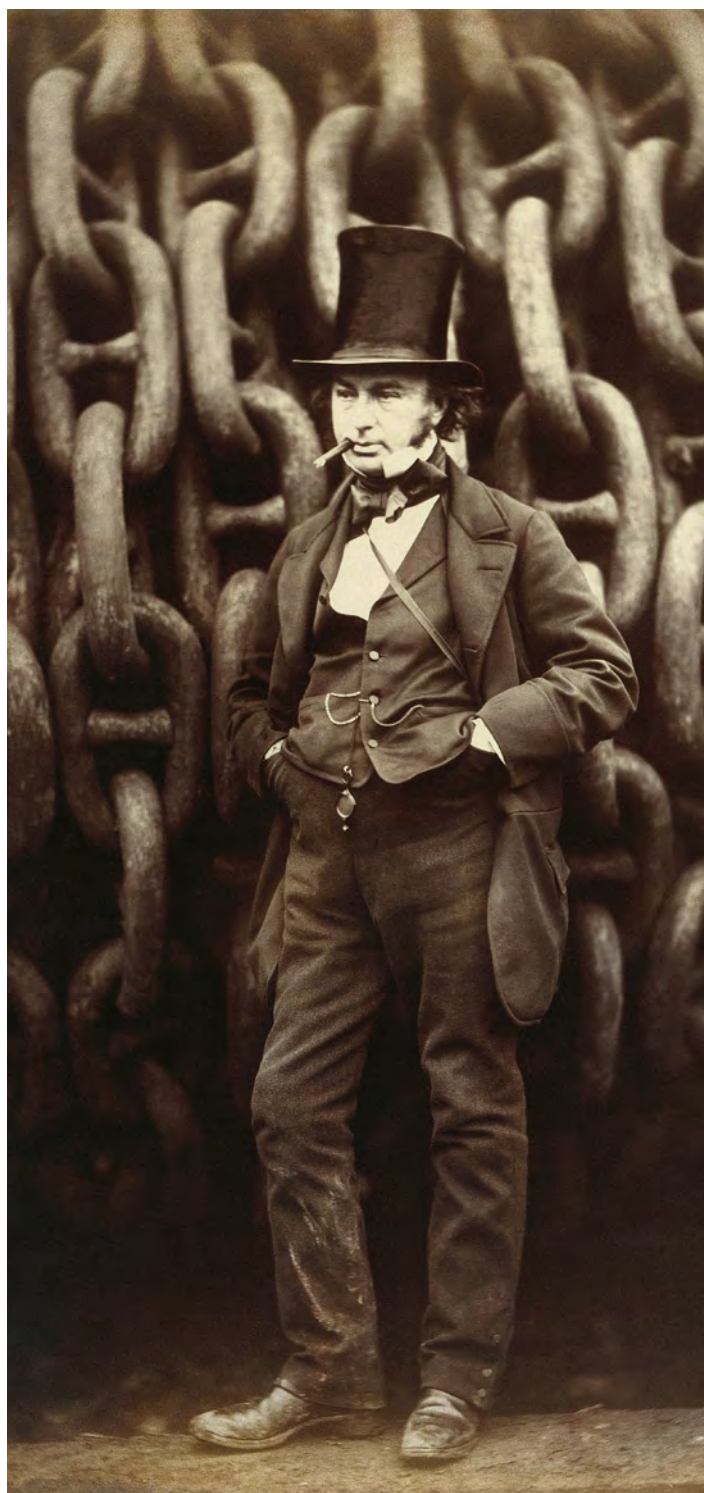
TEXT KEVIN CRAMPTON, WHO
PHOTO WIKICOMMONS

Ask anyone in Britain to name a famous engineer and I'll eat a stovepipe hat if nine times out of ten you don't get the same name in reply. He was voted the second greatest Briton of all time in a BBC survey in 2002 (pipped to the number one spot by Winston Churchill and thrashing Newton who appeared sixth). Although he was, in fact half French and British (and bilingual) he is perhaps lesser known on this side of the Channel now.

The man in question is Isambard Kingdom Brunel, the "*Little Giant*" with the big hat, rarely photographed without a cigar, who crammed so much into his 53 years. Reading the long list of projects in which he had a hand is like a roll call of everything that was innovative, daring and (at times) downright audacious in Victorian engineering.

And it's these qualities that seem to have captured people's imaginations ever since. A 2006 publication about him, commission for the bicentennial of his birth, was entitled "*Brunel, in love with the impossible*" and it's certainly a keynote of his life. If they said it couldn't be done, he was eager to prove them wrong turning his hand to the flattest railways, the widest bridges, the largest steamships and the longest tunnels as well as docks, a prefabricated hospital for use in the Crimean war, and the water towers for the Great Exhibition in London in 1851.

I don't intend to give you a potted biography as there are excellent books and websites already out there (ask your favourite artificial intelligence engine and it'll churn out the main information) but I thought it might be amusing to consider some choice (and lesser known) anecdotes from Brunel's life, the importance of learning from your mistakes, and working in an industry while it is rapidly changing!



Brunel Standing Before the Launching Chains
of the Great Eastern, photograph by Robert Howlett.
Now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

One of the appealing facets of Brunel's work is that there were spectacular failures as well as successes, but nothing seemed to daunt him. His last big project was the ill-fated Great Eastern steamship, a vessel twice the length and five times the weight of anything built before – simply the largest moving object made by the hand of man at that time – and designed to sail non-stop from the UK to Australia. Brunel affectionately called her his “*great babe*” and against all advice and precedent decided to launch the leviathan sideways rather than the traditional lengthways launch.

However, a hugely embarrassing problem occurred. At the launch the enormous ship moved a few feet and then stuck fast, vindicating the critics and humiliating Brunel.

Brunel's solution to getting the enormous ship afloat was to consider the latest cutting-edge technology based on some simple physics. A fleet of hydraulic rams was used to force the ship inch by painstaking inch down the slipway. The sub-contractor that supplied the rams enjoyed great commercial success after such a high-profile project and apparently became fond of saying of his business, “*We launched the Great Eastern and she launched us!*”

One of Brunel's most unusual and innovative ideas was an “*atmospheric railway*” for South Devon in the United Kingdom in which carriages were to be silently propelled by the differential pressure in a pipe running between the tracks. The carriages were connected by a rod into the pipe and pumping stations, situated every two miles, were used to lower the pressure in front of the train and allow it to glide along at a stately 20 miles per hour.

I dread to think just how many pressure equations Brunel grappled with to design his network but, like the Great Eastern, this one was an unfortunate failure – partly due to the fact that local rats ate the leather flaps used to cover parts of the pipe! Brunel took no fee for his work on the project.

My favourite story by far however, related to the fact that Brunel used to entertain his children with a “*coin swallowing*” routine. On one unfortunate occasion he swallowed a half sovereign which lodged in his throat and threatened to choke him. Despite the attentions of Sir Benjamin Brodie, a leading surgeon, the coin refused to budge, and it was Brunel's appreciation of centrifugal force which possibly saved his life.

The story goes that, despite the obvious distracting discomfort, he designed a machine onto which he could be strapped and spun head over heels rapidly so that the coin would be thrown from his throat. A coughing fit spoiled the first attempt but at the second the coin flew out leaving Brunel as fit as could be, or as fit as anyone can be when they smoke reportedly forty cigars a day.

Brunel's output was astounding and for the few projects I mentioned here that ran into difficulties there were dozens that pushed the science, technology and manpower of his age to their limits to produce tunnels, bridges and buildings still in use.

Engineer and showman (he often arranged the fund-raising events for his projects such as a banquet in the Rotherhide tunnel beneath the Thames, London at which he handed out souvenir medals), workaholic and perfectionist (he even designed the lampposts for his railway station platforms) it's said that he wasn't above rolling up his sleeves and joining in with the work if required.

At a time when our own working environment is changing rapidly and in all kinds of unpredictable ways, this quote serves as instructive - Brunel once said to a government commission, “*[I am] opposed to the laying down of rules or conditions to be observed in the construction of bridges lest the progress of improvement tomorrow might be embarrassed or shackled by recording or registering as law the prejudices or errors of today.*” //

Poems from WHO Poetry Garden



SHORT INTRODUCTION INTO THE POEM

2025 is a new page blue and rosy all at once - waiting to write our own story. Making life a bit easier to breathe a bit rosier to be seen. Through the dark glasses that shield my eyesight from going down more. In search of newer realms and newer palettes. A new beginning a new retreat is all that is being planned. But with each day we have a chance to turn to make amends to make trips. To make amends and take steps to take bolder steps surer footing towards an unprejudiced future.

PAHALGAM

Grandpa had a cottage in Pahalgam
We visited when we were quite young
Every October Holidays - by train and bus
and rented vehicles and ponies
Some 20 of us, grandpas and grandmas, uncles
and aunts, young and old and
cousins with cooks and maids, holdalls and
steel trunks, pots and pans
Our carpet tapestried and walnut carved
houseboat and a few Shikaras in the Dal
Held the perfect magic wand
Where we used to catch flying fish and chant
rhymes, slept hard and played harder
cards and chess
Listening to local songs and catching the heat
Of the small charcoal filled tiny pots
which the locals carried inside their angrakhas
to remain warm
Poaching apples - red and green, yellow and
golden and the tiny cherry sized and the 'amri's
From one field to the other,
one cottage to another
Bees stung; our supervisors yelled if we were
caught in the act: but what the hell?
We were in our own rejuvenating HEAVEN
when life held mystique and music
The lavender rows of ZAFRAN fields
and the spewing red gold brown and vibrant
Chinar leaves
The Poplars held the roadsides and
the beautiful people smiled everywhere
Pahalgam had the sweet heady smell of the
pines and the multitude of tiny flowers
Along the vale along the paths and almost
anywhere - where there were some forms
of soil I Believe



The dripping sound wherever they had
cut the bark for collecting the sap
The deafening sounds of silence when
the only music played from the transistor
radio or the discs
We tiptoed in the afternoons and crossed
the rickety wooden bridge over the raucous sea
blue Lidder at times to visit the other
side during our growing years
Catching up with mesmerizing people
who always offered fruits or nuts
to us - the October gang
Crazy us! In beautiful times!
Little did we know that bubble could crash
and crush the beauty and bliss
sometime in our lifetime
Shattered may not be the exact word
or Disgusting may not be discreet enough
But the smudge will remain the dark waves
will forever be blowing away the excitement
giving way to a soulful abyss of heartfelt
solitude despair and overpowering grief
Crazy us! Heartfelt condolences!

Red poppy flower with the petals of love, faith,
hope, peace and freedom is one of the beauties
winding through a magical journey called
"The WHO Poetry Garden".

//

TEXT 1 DR SHANTA GHATAK, WHO SEARO TEXT 2 MS SANGEETA JASMINE, WHO SEARO
TEXT 3 & 4 MRS ARLETTE OSSERE OKOPOUE, WHO AFRO
TEXT 4 DR SHYAM KUMAR ADAPA, WHO SEARO
PHOTO ISTOCK

AAE EYE- THE NEW KID

A new kid entered the big classroom,
Eyebrows rose, who could it be?
A hustle arose, what is its name?
The kid, bright-eyed calmly smiled.

My name is Aae Eye, it gently uttered,
In a fraction of second, queries it replied,
Many envied its swift, accurate mind,
Many wanted to hang around to imitate.

Conceived by homo sapient as an aid,
Science, health, education, technology,
Aae Eye knew it all, name any,
All adopted it without a blink of doubt.

Meta analysis gave precision information,
Used algorithms to predict the outcome,
Aae Eye glanced everything around,
Accurate with options it did respond.

Everyone was attracted to the whiz kid,
All wanted to use its supersonic reach,
The race to capture and explore is seen,
I wonder is it going to take my job indeed?

Many feared to lose their existence,
Will be redundant if the kid continues
to impress,
Mind said don't be foolish, it cannot gossip,
Not all want answering puppet
without intellect!

The kid prevented audience, lead their future,
The kid worked miracles to protect their lives,
Yet lacked emotion and common sense,
Needed handling with coherent care.

It can monitor your health from head to toe,
Bills, investments, travel, and insurance,
Not get prisoned, but retain freewill
to learn and unlearn,
A radical thinking is must to cohabit
with this intelligence.

Sapiens need to create relevant Aae Eyes,
With element of compassion
and not for merchandise,
With ethics to guard and not for cybercrime,
As a genuine friend and not a stalker.

//

LA LIBERTÉ

Tel le vent, léger et sans entraves,
Elle traverse les mers, franchit les terres,
Ouvre les portes, écarte les entraves.

Liberté, tu es l'autodétermination,
Douce promesse de lendemains sans peur,
Tu rends à chacun sa propre direction,
Chassant les tourments qui pèsent
sur les cœurs.

Aux ailes d'espoir, tu brises les chaînes,
Et dissipent les peines d'un souffle clair,
Comme un oiseau libre, loin des fausses rênes,
Tu ignores les murs dressés dans les airs.

Tu survoles montagnes, rivières, frontières,
Défiant les lignes que l'homme impose en vain,
Dans le jardin de la vie, pleine lumière,
Faisant fleurir la paix, écartant le dédain.

Ô Liberté, vérité sans détour,
Dans chaque cœur, tu fais grandir l'amour,
Sous ta lumière, tout doute s'efface,
Tu parles la langue de l'univers,
Unissant les âmes d'une voix sincère.

Tu abolies les distances, dissipes les murs,
Réunissant les peuples, d'un trait si pur,
Comblant les dissonances
d'harmonies profondes,
Liberté, lien qui relie les mondes.

Sous ton règne, les esprits s'élèvent,
Défiant les limites de l'inaccessible,
Les rêves se forment, les idéaux s'embrasent,
Car tu es le souffle qui toujours efface,
Les ombres qui cherchent à emprisonner.

Tu guides les mains des artistes créateurs,
Inspires les voix des poètes rêveurs,
Et dans chaque révolte douce et pacifique,
C'est ton nom que l'on chante,
d'un ton magnifique.

Liberté, phare pour les opprimés,
Tu éclaires ceux qui veulent se libérer,
Sous ta flamme, les cœurs en quête s'unissent,
Et en toi, les hommes réapprennent à vivre.

Ainsi, dans l'éclat de ta vérité,
S'éveille un monde, libre, réconcilié,
Où chaque être trouve enfin sa place.

//

FREEDOM

Like the wind, light and unrestrained,
It crosses seas, spans lands untamed,
Opens doors, removes the chains.

Freedom, you are self-determination,
Sweet promise of fearless tomorrows,
You restore to each their own direction,
Banishing the weight of sorrows.

On wings of hope, you shatter the chains,
Dispersing pain with a clear breath,
Like a free bird, far from false reins,
You defy walls drawn in the sky's breadth.

You soar over mountains, rivers, borders,
Defying lines man vainly imposes,
In life's garden, full of radiance,
You make peace bloom, casting off disdain.

O Freedom, truth without disguise,
You nurture love in every heart,
Under your light, all doubt subsides,
You speak the language of the stars,
Uniting souls with a voice so sincere.

You erase distances, dissolve walls,
Bringing nations together with a pure call,
Bridging dissonance with deep harmony,
Freedom, bond that unites humanity.

Under your reign, minds ascend,
Defying the bounds of the unattainable,
Dreams are born, ideals blaze bright,
For you are the breath that always dissolves
The shadows seeking to imprison light.

You guide the hands of creating artists,
Inspire the voices of dreaming poets,
And in every gentle, peaceful revolt,
Your name is sung, glorious and bold.

Freedom, beacon for the oppressed,
You shine for those who yearn for rest,
Under your flame, searching hearts unite,
And in you, humanity rediscovers life.

Thus, in the brilliance of your truth,
Awakens a world, free, reconciled,
Where every being finds their place at last.

//

POEM FROM THE INTENSIVE
CARE UNIT

This poem was written while I was taking care of my father-in-law in the intensive care unit (ICU), who was recently hospitalised with CVA with quadriplegia. So many cases were admitted with a little hope of life. So, I thought of writing how ICU beds may respond if they could speak.

THE QUIET GUARDIAN

I lie still, cold, Yet I carry warmth
The warmth of lives clinging to hope,
The ache of bodies with battling robe.

People come to me with,
Eyes glazed with fear,
Hands trembling, breath shallow,
Carrying dreams half-lived.

But I don't flinch when they cry.
I've held the strong and the broken,
The young with futures stolen,
And the old with whispers of life being taken.

Machines hum around me,
Monitors beep,
Nurses rush.
But I stay, grounded,
Quietly witnessing every tear.

I've felt hearts slow to silence,
And seen miracles stir lungs back to life.
Some leave me with a smile,
Some never wake to see the light again.

I am not just steel and padding.
I absorb every story,
Every whispered prayer,
Every silent scream.

I carry not just weight
But love, loss, and all the fragile hopes
That come with every human breath.

//

The Man's Journey

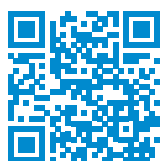
"OPPORTUNITY DOES NOT KNOCK, IT PRESENTS ITSELF WHEN YOU BEAT DOWN THE DOOR.", KYLE CHANDLER.

I'VE ALWAYS LIKED THAT QUOTE, BUT I NEVER EXPECTED A TEDX TALK TO COME WITH JUST 18 DAYS' NOTICE.



LEARN +

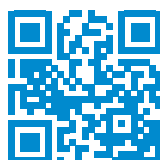
Toastmasters
International



J. Franklin
Youtube



J. Franklin
Website



Every person carries a 'why' - and behind every 'why' lies a story worth telling. This is my story...

I've always had my head in the clouds - I admit it. That habit earned me poor grades in school, and those poor grades led to reprimands from my parents and teachers. But for me, drifting off into my imagination wasn't a choice, it was a necessity! I only realized this 2022 when, at the age of 38, I was diagnosed with ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

"Accurate diagnosis is half the cure" medical proverb

Learning about this condition finally gave me the answers I'd been searching for and the strength to complete an online master's in Emotional Intelligence, Positive Psychology, and Mindfulness. Now, I've chosen to focus fully on what I call my own holy trinity: mind, body, and soul without medication. It's amazing how much things have improved since the diagnosis. I'm beginning to understand myself in a way I never have before.

And I am in great company! Many successful people also face ADHD, including Will Smith, Emma Watson, Jim Carrey, Simone Biles and Michael Jordan.

It was clear to me that this was something I was meant to talk about publicly, both to motivate others and to raise awareness. And that's when the idea of a TEDx Talk first came to mind. I wanted to share my experience of overcoming ADHD to inspire and help others in the same situation.

About TEDx

Over 3,000 TEDx events take place every year, and while it can be challenging to get in, it's not impossible. If you have an idea worth sharing, I'm sure at least one of these events would be excited to hear your story and the message you want to spread. The list of upcoming TEDx events is found at www.ted.com/tedx/events. When you apply as a potential speaker, you will be asked a few questions such as your speech title, the core idea behind it and what makes you an expert on the topic. Sometimes you will be asked for a short video of yourself explaining your 'why'. Rejections happen, but don't let them stop you. Perseverance pays off. For me, I didn't receive any response until something happened...

Preparing a TEDx talk under a tight deadline

Due to a last-minute speaker cancellation at TEDx-GVAGrad, I was asked to step in. However, I faced one big challenge during this experience: timing. I had only 18 days to get ready.

"18 days!?" I thought. How could anyone be fully prepared for something as important as a TEDx talk in that short of a time? I must admit it: I wasn't 100% ready! However, I was not going to let this opportunity pass me by. I had to get to work!

Those 18 days were intense: research, rehearsals, and the constant mental adjustment to the reality that I'd soon be on stage. Luckily, I wasn't on this journey alone. The United Nations Geneva Toastmasters club (a non-profit organization, dedicated to enhancing public speaking, communication skills and leadership) offered mentorship to Graduate Institute students involved in the 2025 TEDxGVAGrad event, and I was fortunate enough to be a part of it.



With Alan Kikuchi-White (beside me),
Yoko Owatari (bottom left)
and Irina Matreunic (top left).

I am indebted to several Toastmasters members who helped me bring my talk to life. Yoko Owatari, Damien Gautier, and Irina Matreunic gave me invaluable feedback on my presentation. Leonilda Renaldo, another member, also hosted a workshop on how to deliver an effective TEDx talk. Alan Kikuchi-White, a professional public speaking coach and TEDx speaker, helped refine my speaking style, projection, body language, and wording.

These people reminded me that I wasn't alone. When I stood on stage, it felt like they were right there with me.

Overcoming fear

Over the course of those 18 days, my speech script was revised at least three times, shaped by feedback from my mentors and the TEDx team. I accepted the insights and made the necessary adjustments, always keeping in mind what Helen Keller so wisely said: *"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."*

As a non-native English speaker, I was terrified to step on stage. *"What if my message doesn't come across clearly? What if I forget a line? What if... what if..."*

I nearly backed out; I admit that too. But then I paused and thought: *"This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity is meant for me, and I might not get it twice. People might truly resonate with my message."*

If you ever aim to deliver a TEDx talk, be prepared that fear will always be there, and it's up to you to channel it in your favor.

Before jumping in...

Choose a topic that you genuinely care about. When doing so, keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Know your 'why' – What's driving you to speak in front of an audience or a camera? Is it to inspire, educate, or share something meaningful?
2. Remember: it's not about you – it's about the message you want to share with others. How can your words make a positive impact and contribute to a better world?
3. Understand your speaking style – Are you persuasive, informative, or more of an impromptu speaker? The style TEDx typically looks for is a blend of all the speaking types but delivered in a more conversational tone. Think of it as having a face-to-face conversation with the audience.

Seek help, look for coaching, and ask for feedback. And why not consider joining a Toastmasters club? It has been around since 1924. Today it has almost 300,000 members in 13,800 clubs in 150 countries. To find a club near you, visit www.toastmasters.org.

The Man's Journey

My TEDx talk, *The Man's Journey*, is now live on YouTube! After the video came out, people have reached out to share similar stories; some feeling isolated, others are afraid of being judged. It means a lot to me to know that my journey might have brought even a little comfort to someone still in silence. If you have a story to share, I'd be honored to read it in the comments. Your voice is just as important as mine. And who knows? Maybe one day you will share it on the TEDx stage. //

United Nations Geneva Toastmasters club: TEDx Speech feedback



J. FRANKLIN



WHERE
COMPANIES
BECOME
BRANDS



Les Baux-de-Provence

ENTRE CIEL ET PIERRE

SAVOIR +

Office
du tourisme
Les Baux-de-
Provence



Carrières
des Lumières



Nichés au cœur des paysages ensoleillés du sud de la France, les Baux-de-Provence offrent une destination authentique aux multiples facettes. Cette cité médiévale, perchée sur une falaise au sein du Parc naturel régional des Alpilles, est un trésor historique, artistique et culturel.

A 15 km d'Arles et 25 km d'Avignon, les Baux-de-Provence sont un incontournable de la Provence qui mérite amplement votre visite. Le village est une véritable pépite. En vous promenant dans ses ruelles étroites, vous découvrirez un charme unique. Chaque pierre raconte une histoire dans ce lieu où le temps semble s'être arrêté.

Profondément enracinés dans leur passé glorieux, Les Baux-de-Provence vous invitent sur les chemins de l'Histoire. De son château majestueux à ses vingt-deux monuments classés, en passant par ses ruelles sinueuses, la cité livre ses secrets et ses récits à tout visiteur curieux de les découvrir. Votre balade devient gourmande dans ce haut lieu de la gastronomie. Des étoiles plein les yeux, goûtons aux saveurs des chefs et aux vins de la Vallée des Baux, 100 % bio. Reine de ses vallons, l'huile d'olive locale, plusieurs fois primée, offre des notes florales et épicées. Vignes et oliveraies donnent à ses paysages ce caractère provençal, à la fois vert et minéral, qui a séduit dès le XIX^e siècle plus d'un artiste. Jean Cocteau, le graveur et typographe Louis Jou, le peintre Yves Brayer, le danseur et chorégraphe Dominique Dupuy et, dernièrement, le pianiste et compositeur André Manoukian, tous ont trouvé l'inspiration auprès de cet éperon rocheux lové dans son écrin de verdure. La nature se met ici en lumière au fil des randonnées et des balades dans ces si singulières Alpilles.

AU FIL DES RUELLES PAVÉES

Après avoir franchi la Porte Eyguières, seul accès au village jusqu'en 1866, vous pourrez au fil de votre balade admirer de splendides demeures dont l'Hôtel de Porcelet datant du XVI^e siècle et qui abrite actuellement le Musée Yves Brayer. Édifié en 1571, l'Hôtel de Manville style Renaissance, avec sa magnifique cour intérieure à portiques, héberge quant à lui l'Hôtel de ville. Juste en face, les vestiges d'une demeure de 1571 porte l'inscription calviniste « Post Tenebras Lux », également devise qui orne les armoiries de Genève.

Sans doute l'élément le plus énigmatique du village qui suggère l'existence d'un oratoire réformé au XVI^e siècle, une époque où les Protestants étaient nombreux aux Baux-de-Provence.

La Maison du Roy bâtie en 1499, le Pavillon de la Reine Jeanne situé près de l'ancien lavoir, les stèles funéraires des Tremaille et des Gaïe d'époque romaine ne manquent eux aussi pas d'intérêt.

Construite au XVII^e siècle, la chapelle des Pénitents Blancs charme par son histoire et son décor. Dédiée à Sainte-Estelle, elle rend hommage aux anciens Pénitents et vaut également le détour. Mais parmi les témoins de la richesse du patrimoine historique et architectural des Baux-de-Provence, l'Église Saint-Vincent (XII^e siècle) mérite particulièrement que l'on s'y attarde. Typique des constructions bausseuses avec sa partie méridionale à moitié troglodytique, elle abrite la chapelle funéraire gothique flamboyante de la Famille de Manville. Les vitraux modernes du maître verrier Max Ingrand ont été offerts en 1962 par le Prince Rainier III de Monaco.

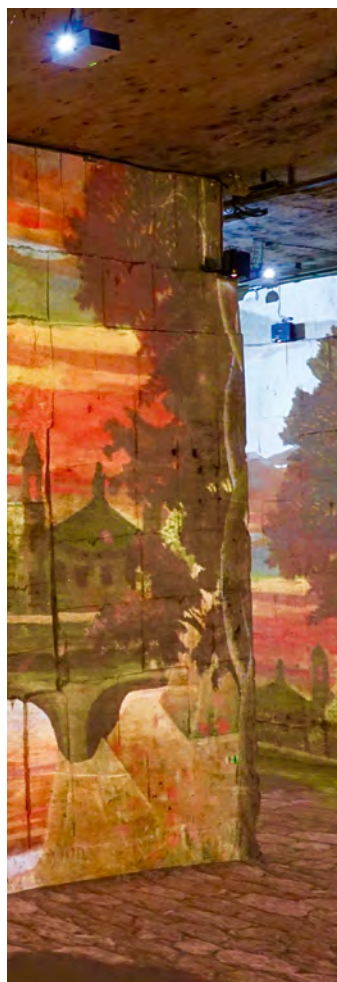
À LA CONQUÊTE DE LA FORTERESSE

Vaisseau de pierre à la silhouette imposante, le Château des Baux-de-Provence, classé monument historique, vous dévoile le passé tumultueux des seigneurs des Baux. Du haut de son rocher escarpé, il offre un panorama exceptionnel sur la Provence. Implantée sur un site stratégique, la forteresse médiévale, creusée à même la roche, a abrité l'illustre famille des Baux qui se prétendait descendante du mage Balthazar. Les tours comme le donjon sont les témoins les plus représentatifs du passé défensif du site.

Dès l'époque néolithique (6000 ans avant J.-C.), une population relativement dense vivait ici, mais ce n'est qu'au début du Moyen Âge que naquit vraiment la cité. Grâce aux échanges commerciaux qui se sont intensifiés à l'époque romaine ainsi qu'au développement des axes de circulation qui ont permis aux habitants de se spécialiser dans l'extraction et le travail de la pierre, le village entre dans une ère prospère. Les seigneurs des Baux étendent alors leurs possessions dans toute la Provence, le Comtat Venaissin, le Dauphiné et en terre italienne.

TEXT & PHOTOS
CLAUDE MAILLARD

Les Carrières des Lumières offrent un spectacle artistique immersif qui attire chaque année des milliers de visiteurs.



En partie troglodytique, l'église Saint-Vincent datant du XII^e siècle est un joyau des Baux-de-Provence.

C'est à cette période que le château est construit. Mais en 1426, la disparition d'Alix, dernière princesse des Baux qui n'a pas de descendance, sonne la fin d'une époque glorieuse. Au XVI^e siècle, les Baux-de-Provence, tout en restant un important centre de pouvoir féodal, intègrent progressivement les influences de la Renaissance. Grâce à l'impulsion d'Anne de Montmorency, Baron des Baux, le village connaît un nouvel essor avec l'édification de magnifiques hôtels particuliers. Au XIX^e siècle, alors que la population décline et que la « ville basse » émerge dans la plaine, la bourgade semble sombrer dans l'oubli. Il faudra attendre la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle pour qu'elle renaisse, portée par le souffle des passionnés de patrimoine, des artistes et l'engouement pour la Provence. Aujourd'hui, le charme des ruelles pavées et des édifices historiques attire les visiteurs du monde entier.

LES CARRIÈRES DES LUMIÈRES, UNE EXPÉRIENCE UNIQUE

Les Carrières des Lumières - centre d'art numérique projetant des expositions immersives - offrent un spectacle artistique qui attire chaque année des milliers de visiteurs. Des œuvres d'artistes célèbres sont projetées en musique sur les murs de 14 mètres de haut d'une ancienne carrière, créant une expérience visuelle magique. Les visiteurs se promènent au cœur de ce spectacle, véritable voyage hors du temps.

A l'origine, ces carrières ont été creusées pour en extraire le calcaire blanc utilisé pour la construction du Château et de la Cité des Baux-de-Provence. En 1935, la concurrence économique des matériaux modernes conduit à leur fermeture. Jean Cocteau sera le premier à être émerveillé par la beauté des lieux et décide d'y tourner des séquences de son film « Le Testament d'Orphée ». En 1975, Albert Plécy, rédacteur en chef au « Parisien libéré » et président des « Gens d'Images » - association qui regroupe des professionnels passionnés pour l'image sous toutes ses formes - tombe à son tour en admiration devant les carrières, et deux années plus tard naît « Cathédrale d'Images » qui organise des expositions où des images géantes sont projetées sur les parois lisses de la carrière. Depuis, ce festival s'est renouvelé chaque année avec des thèmes différents. En 2012, le site prend le nom de « Carrières des Lumières » et présente alors une exposition consacrée aux peintres Gauguin et Van Gogh qui attire 250 000 visiteurs.



Créateur de l'Impressionnisme, Claude Monet (1840-1926) est à l'affiche cette année de l'exposition programmée jusqu'en janvier 2026. Elle retrace l'œuvre du peintre, évoquant son parcours de la Normandie à la Méditerranée, avec des étapes marquantes à Londres et Giverny. Elle met en lumière ses techniques novatrices, son amour pour le plein air, l'influence des estampes japonaises et de la photographie, ainsi que le rôle central de son jardin de Giverny dans sa créativité.

En complément, une exposition célèbre l'univers unique d'Henri Rousseau (1844-1910), aussi appelé « Le Douanier Rousseau », peintre autodidacte au style naïf. Ses œuvres oniriques mêlent jungles luxuriantes, animaux sauvages et scènes poétiques d'un Paris industriel en pleine transformation. D'abord moqué, Rousseau a su gagner l'admiration de figures avant-gardistes comme Picasso et Kandinsky, grâce à son audace créative et son regard moderniste. Ses paysages exotiques et ses couleurs vibrantes invitent à une évasion empreinte de poésie.

Classés parmi les Plus Beaux Villages de France et Site Patrimonial Remarquable, Les Baux-de-Provence donnent à voir, ressentir et découvrir en toute saison. //

Face à l'hôtel de Manville, les vestiges d'une demeure de 1571 portent l'inscription calviniste « Post Tenebras Lux ».

Podcasts

THE GLOBAL HEALTH MATTERS PODCAST PROVIDES A FORUM FOR DISCUSSING THE MOST IMPORTANT GLOBAL HEALTH TOPICS OF THE DAY



Le col de Lukmanier

COLS ROUTIERS DE SUISSE (18)

SAVOIR +

Église San
Carlo de
Negrentino



Association
Pro Lucmagno



Centre
Pro Natura



Hospice
Santa Maria



La route du col de Lukmanier commence à Olivone, dans le canton du Tessin, à 900 mètres d'altitude. Pour y arriver, il faut d'abord passer par le val di Blenio, qui se caractérise par des joyaux d'églises romanes, disséminées un peu partout dans la vallée. Déjà à Biasca, où on prend la route pour le val Blenio, l'église St Pierre et Paul, construite au 12^e siècle, impressionne par ses fresques qui datent à partir du 13^e siècle. Mais la plus importante de ces églises se trouve cachée dans les collines près d'Aquarossa: la petite mais splendide église de San Carlo de Negrentino avec ses murs couverts de fresques en style byzantine datant du onzième au quinzième siècle. Comme nous sommes à vélo, pédaler jusqu'à Olivone en s'arrêtant pour admirer la beauté des lieux nous prend déjà toute la journée. Donc ce n'est que le lendemain que nous commençons la vraie montée vers le col.

Le col de Lukmanier relie le val de Blenio dans le canton du Tessin à la vallée du Rhin antérieur, le Rhin de Medel, aux Grisons. Son nom vient du latin *lucus magnus*, ce qui veut dire « grande forêt ». Le col devint très important après la fondation du monastère de Disentis dans la région Surselva des Grisons vers l'an 720. Comme le col se trouve à 1915 mètres d'altitude, donc plus bas que la plupart des cols alpins, il était assez facile à franchir. En fait, même aujourd'hui, le col de Lukmanier est le seul col routier qui traverse les Alpes du nord au sud sans dépasser les 2000 mètres d'altitude ou sans passer par un long tunnel.

Au Moyen Âge, le col était considéré la plus importante liaison nord-sud vers l'Italie, où le monastère de Disentis possédait des biens en Lombardie. C'est d'ailleurs le monastère qui contrôlait la route vers le col côté nord. Le col était aussi fréquenté par des pèlerins et, sur la route, se trouvaient plusieurs hospices qui servaient également d'entrepôts. En 1374 le monastère construisit l'hospice Santa Maria avec une chapelle sur le col même. Au 15^e siècle, le col perdit son importance au profit des cols du Gothard, de Splügen et de San Bernardino, et devint une voie secondaire, surtout utilisée par le trafic local.

En 1869, la Confédération choisit le Gothard et non le Lukmanier pour la construction d'un che-

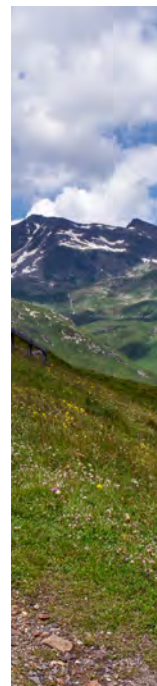
min de fer. Comme alternative, il fut décidé de réaliser une route carrossable vers le col de Lukmanier; des nouvelles galeries couvertes furent construites pour traverser les gorges du Rhin de Medel. Depuis 1878 il existait un service de diligences qui furent remplacés par des cars postaux en 1911. Dans les années 1960 la route fut élargie pour faciliter la construction d'un lac de barrage sur le col par lequel passe le Rhin de Medel qui a sa source à 2450 mètres d'altitude dans le lac Scuro. Cette source du Rhin est la source la plus éloignée de l'embouchure du Rhin dans la mer du nord, mais la source officielle du Rhin se trouve à côté du col de l'Oberalp, dans le lac Toma¹. À cause de la construction du barrage, l'ancien hospice et la chapelle furent démolis et reconstruits un peu plus loin. Grâce à l'association Pro Lucmagn, la route reste désormais ouverte en hiver et beaucoup de touristes en profitent.

Entre Olivone et le col, la route a besoin de 19 kilomètres pour combler un dénivelé de 1020 mètres. Une montée tranquille donc, sans difficultés. Depuis Olivone on a une belle vue sur le Pizzo Rosetto, qui domine le paysage malgré son altitude modeste de 2097 mètres. Après 5 kilomètres sur la route panoramique, nous voilà à Camperio, où se trouve un hospice construit en 1254 qui a été rénové et élargi plusieurs fois et accueille toujours des voyageurs. Nous continuons encore sur une dizaine de kilomètres pour arriver à Aquacalda, à 1750 mètres d'altitude, où se trouve un centre Pro Natura, sur l'ancien emplacement de l'hospice, transformé en hôtel dans les années 1950. Le Centre offre des chambres et dortoirs, un camping et un restaurant, et organise des manifestations et des excursions.

Plusieurs chemins pédestres partent depuis le Centre pour découvrir la forêt d'arolles de la Selvasacca, un endroit extraordinaire, la plus vaste forêt d'arolles du sud de la Suisse: il y a des arbres âgés de plus de 3 siècles. Plusieurs de ces arbres ont des formes rares et impressionnantes avec des troncs tordus, sujet populaire pour des photos.

Plus loin sur la route, à Cassacia, se trouve un grand parking qui est le départ de randonnées, en été comme en hiver. À côté de la buvette, nous trouvons des edelweiss sauvages, signe de la richesse de la flore ici. En face de la route se trouve la plaine de la rivière Brenno, paysage fluvial alpin de toute beauté. On peut suivre la rivière jusqu'à la source

TEXTE & PHOTOS
CARLA EDELENBOS, UN SOCIETY OF WRITERS



de Pertusio, où émerge la plus grande partie d'eau de la pluie qui s'infiltré par les roches carbonatées du Lukmanier pour alimenter le Brenno. La rivière se jette après 36 kilomètres dans le Tessin à Biasca, qui à son tour se termine dans le fleuve Pô pour enfin joindre la mer Adriatique.

Encore quelques kilomètres et nous voilà au col ! L'hospice sur le col est ouvert en été uniquement et offre des chambres et des dortoirs. Le restaurant est bondé et nous fuyons sa terrasse animée pour nous recueillir à la chapelle éloignée d'une centaine de mètres, avec vue sur le lac de Santa Maria. À l'intérieur de la chapelle se trouvent des fresques du 16^e siècle sauvées de l'ancienne chapelle submergée par les eaux. Une grande statue de la Vierge domine le col. C'est là que nous faisons notre pique-nique.

Après cette pause bien méritée, nous commençons la descente et passons du Tessin aux Grisons, de l'italien au romanche. D'abord, la route passe par une galerie qui longe le lac, et ce n'est qu'au mur du barrage que la route retrouve l'air libre. La descente suit le cours du Rhin de Medel au milieu des alpages et traverse plusieurs hameaux. À Platta, l'église de St. Martin, avec sa tour du 12^e siècle, attire le regard. Après le village de Curaglia, la route traverse le Rhin et offre une belle vue sur les gorges sauvages. Ensuite, la route passe par des tunnels et des galeries, et nous ne pouvons plus nous arrêter pour admirer le panorama. Enfin, après 20 kilomètres de descente agréable, la belle ville de Disentis dominée par son monastère, nous accueille, une conclusion magnifique de ce périple par le col de Lukmanier. //

1 Voir l'article sur le col d'Oberalp dans le New Special de mai 2023.

La chapelle Santa Maria
au col.

La route traversant les gorges
du Rhin de Medel.

Laos

AU FIL DU MÉKONG 3/3

TEXT & PHOTOS
CLAUDE MAILLARD

Le Laos est un pays formidable, paisible, et qui trouve toute sa richesse dans sa nature sauvage, riche et verdoyante, ses cours d'eau, ses cascades, ses villages perchés dans les montagnes. Il faut prendre son temps pour le visiter et découvrir toutes ses splendeurs. Au Laos, où le temps semble s'être arrêté, il faut voyager doucement, il faut se laisser porter par le rythme de ses habitants.

C'est pourtant à 160 km/h que va se poursuivre notre voyage depuis Luang Prabang à bord du train à grande vitesse du Laos (voir le précédent numéro du *newSpecial*). L'histoire ferroviaire du Laos débute à la fin du XIX^e siècle lorsque les autorités coloniales françaises décidèrent de construire une ligne de chemin de fer dans le sud du pays, au cœur de l'archipel des Quatre Mille îles. Longue de 7 km, elle permettait de contourner l'obstacle infranchissable que constituaient les chutes de Khone Phapheng et de développer le commerce sur le Mékong. Son exploitation a cessé au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale et il faudra attendre 2021 pour revoir un train circuler au Laos, sur la ligne qui relie Vientiane, capitale laotienne, à la ville chinoise de Kunming.

Lovée dans une boucle du Mékong face à la ville thaïlandaise de Nong Khai, Vientiane est certainement l'une des dernières capitales asiatiques qui se prêtent à la flânerie, sous les frangipaniers qui embaument ses rues. De taille relativement modeste (800 000 habitants), elle donne au voyageur l'impression d'une petite bourgade de province. Fondée aux alentours du IX^e siècle, la ville de Vientiane a connu depuis des fortunes et des destins divers. Parfois rasée ou pillée, elle a toujours su renaître de ses cendres pour devenir un centre administratif et religieux important au cours de son histoire. Depuis les années 2000, Vientiane connaît un développement économique important. Mais cela ne l'a pas empêché de conserver un calme et une authenticité uniques qui tranchent avec le reste de l'Asie.

VIENTIANE, LA CAPITALE

Au cœur de Vientiane se dresse majestueusement Pha That Luang, le très « saint stupa royal ». Ce monument bouddhique doré haut de 45 mètres incarne l'âme du pays et captive par sa beauté éblouissante.

Véritable emblème national, il orne fièrement les armoiries et les billets de banque laotiens. Les racines de Pha That Luang remontent au III^e siècle lorsqu'il fut fondé pour abriter une précieuse relique de Bouddha. La structure originelle date de l'époque khmère - XII^e et XIII^e siècle - et le stupa que nous admirons de nos jours fut édifié en 1566 sous l'égide du roi Setthathirat. Cette construction marqua un tournant dans l'histoire du Laos, symbolisant le transfert de la capitale du royaume de Luang Prabang à Vientiane. Pha That Luang devint ainsi le cœur spirituel et politique de la nouvelle capitale. Tous les ans, à la pleine lune du mois de novembre, s'y déroule un grand festival attirant les pèlerins venant de tout le pays.

Au nord de l'avenue Lan Xang (considérée comme les Champs Élysées de Vientiane), trône Patuxay (Porte de la victoire), arc de triomphe édifié dans les années 1960 pour célébrer la mémoire des victimes de guerres pré-révolutionnaires. À l'extrémité sud, face au palais présidentiel, Vat Si Sakhet est considéré comme le plus beau et le plus grand temple de Vientiane. Il a été construit entre 1819 et 1824 pour Anouvong, dernier souverain de Vientiane. Depuis sa résidence royale, il s'y rendait pour recevoir le serment d'allégeance des notables du pays. Le temple a été épargné lors de la destruction de la ville par les Siamois au XIX^e siècle et ainsi, les milliers de statues de bouddha abritées dans son cloître ont été sauvegardées.

VAT PHOU, UN JOYAU HISTORIQUE

De taille moyenne (236 800 km²), mais de par sa configuration tout en longueur (1500 km du nord au sud), le Laos nécessite parfois l'utilisation de l'avion pour découvrir les principaux points d'intérêt du pays. Une heure de vol va nous propulser à Paksé - dernier poste-frontière méridional avec la Thaïlande - dans la province de Champasak qui saura séduire tous les voyageurs avec notamment les fabuleuses ruines khmères du Vat Phou classées par l'Unesco depuis 2001. Datant du Ve siècle, ce complexe de temples témoigne de l'influence de l'hindouisme et du bouddhisme dans la région. Sa construction en plusieurs étapes qui reflète les différentes périodes de l'histoire khmère permet de distinguer plusieurs styles architecturaux, dont le style préangkorien et angkorien.

De nombreuses cascades rafraîchissantes émaillent le plateau des Bolovens.



Situées sur le Mékong, les chutes de Khone Phapheng sont les plus larges d'Asie du Sud-Est.



Le Vat Phou a joué un rôle important dans l'histoire du Laos. Il était un centre religieux et politique majeur, ainsi qu'un point de passage pour les marchands et les pèlerins. Les inscriptions retrouvées sur le site témoignent de l'échange culturel et des relations diplomatiques entre le Laos et les autres pays limitrophes, tels que le Cambodge et la Thaïlande. Le sanctuaire principal, les palais nord et sud, le Baray (grand bassin artificiel) et la bibliothèque constituent les monuments emblématiques du Vat Phou.

Côté nature, la province de Champasak offre également de rafraîchissantes cascades (Tad Muong, Tad Gneuang, Tad Fane) qui émaillent le plateau des Bolovens, vaste étendue de terres particulièrement fertiles situées à environ 1000 mètres d'altitude. Un climat plus frais et plus humide que dans la vallée du Mékong a permis le développement de la culture du café (introduit par les Français à l'époque du protectorat) et plus récemment d'hévéa, de céréales, ainsi que de nombreuses productions maraîchères et fruitières pour alimenter les marchés des grands centres urbains de la région. La population du plateau est composée de nombreuses minorités ethniques du groupe austro asiatique (Môn-khmer), comme les Lavens - qui ont donné leur nom au plateau -, Alak, Katu et Ngae.

LES QUATRE MILLE ÎLES

À l'extrême sud du Laos, le lit du Mékong s'élargit, pouvant atteindre par endroits jusqu'à 14 km d'une rive à l'autre au plus fort de la saison des pluies. En saison sèche en revanche, la baisse du niveau des eaux laisse émerger une myriade d'îles et d'îlots - Si Phan Don, les « Quatre Mille Îles » - dont certains sont alors mis en culture ou servent de pâturage aux buffles. Seule une poignée d'îles permanentes, comme Don Khong et Don Khone, accueillent quelques hameaux - Ban Sala, Ban Muong - qui ont su préserver leur authenticité. L'atmosphère est détendue, les paysages magnifiques et les habitants accueillants. Calme et verdure sont au rendez-vous ; idéal pour faire des balades très sympas parmi les rizières et pour vadrouiller à la rencontre des locaux qui vivent de la pêche, du tissage et de l'agriculture.

Près de la frontière avec le Cambodge se succèdent sur plusieurs kilomètres les spectaculaires chutes de Khone Phapheng et de Li Phi. Considérés comme les plus larges d'Asie du Sud-Est, ces rapides infranchissables constituent le principal obstacle à la navigation sur le Mékong entre la Chine et le delta du fleuve, au sud du Vietnam.

Poste-frontière de Nong Nok Khiene : formalités d'immigration terminées, notre aventure au fil du Mékong se poursuit maintenant au Cambodge. A vivre dans le prochain numéro du newSpecial. //

Appel à candidatures Call for Applications

COMITÉ ÉDITORIAL DU MAGAZINE *NEWSPECIAL*
NEWSPECIAL MAGAZINE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE



newSpecial est le magazine qui, en 2019, a hérité des plus de 75 ans d'Histoire de son prédécesseur *UN Special*. *newSpecial* reste une voix entendue au sein de la communauté internationale à Genève.

Cet appel à candidatures a pour objet de trouver de nouveaux volontaires qui seraient intéressés à rejoindre notre équipe et contribueront:

1. Huit (8) membres contributeurs qui couvriront au moins deux des domaines du magazine et contribueront à au moins 10 articles par an). Les thématiques du magazine abordent:

- Agences internationales à Genève
- Genève Internationale
- Fonctionnaires et problème de personnel
- Essais photographiques et visuels
- Loisirs et randonnées
- Santé et bien être
- Art et culture
- Travail de l'OMS et lié

2. Deux (2) relecteurs-correcteurs éditeront le contenu de 10 numéros par an, en anglais et en français et maîtriseront une autre langue de l'ONU. Ils pourront, de manière occasionnelle, éditer des articles dans une autre langue de l'ONU.

Ce travail est bénévole et est ouvert uniquement aux membres du personnel actuels des organisations internationales à Genève. Les membres sélectionnés exerceront un mandat de deux ans à compter de novembre 2025.

Merci de bien vouloir envoyer une courte note (quelques paragraphes), indiquant le poste qui vous intéresse, l'expérience que vous comptez apporter au comité de rédaction et d'inclure un court CV.

Votre lettre devra être adressée par courrier électronique au Dr Garry Aslanyan, rédacteur en chef du magazine et envoyée au plus tard le **30 septembre 2025** à l'adresse suivante: info@newspecial.org.

The *newSpecial* magazine builds on over 75 years of history of its predecessor publication – the *UN Special* magazine. Since 2019, *newSpecial* has continued to be a strong voice for civil servants working at international organizations in Geneva.

This call is for members of the Editorial Committee of the magazine, including:

1. Eight (8) contributing members who will cover at least two of the areas of the magazine and contribute to at least 10 articles per year). Magazine areas are:

- International Agencies in Geneva
- International Geneva
- Civil servants and staff issues
- Photo and visual essays
- Leisure and hiking
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2. Two (2) copy editors who will edit the content of 10 issues per year in English and French plus have a command of another UN language to occasionally edit articles in another UN language).

This is voluntary engagement and is open only to current staff members of international organizations in Geneva. All members selected will serve for a two-year term starting in November 2025.

Please send a short note (a couple of paragraphs), indicating which position you are interested in and the experience you will bring to the editorial board. Please include a short CV.

Your letter should be addressed to Dr Garry Aslanyan, Editor-in-Chief, *newSpecial* magazine and emailed to info@newspecial.org, no later than **30 September 2025**.

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Régie publicitaire
Advertising agency
 BuxumLunic SA
 +41 79 560 48 28
 v.mani@buxumlunic.ch

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Aimeriez-vous partager votre opinion avec nous au sujet de newSpecial et de son contenu ? Nous serons toujours ravis de lire vos réactions. Les réponses intéressantes, parfois même ingénieuses et constructives seront publiées dans le magazine. Souhaitez-vous soumettre un article, un sujet ? Vous pouvez nous contacter quand vous le souhaitez.

Adressez vos commentaires à :
 Garry Aslanyan - newSpecial
 OMS, 20 av. Appia
 CH-1202 Genève
 Suisse
info@newspecial.org

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Would you like to share your opinion about newSpecial and its contents? We will be glad to hear from you. The most interesting, relevant, or even ingenious responses will be published in the magazine. Should you wish to submit an article or a subject, please do not hesitate to contact us at any time.

Send your thoughts to:
 Garry Aslanyan - newSpecial
 WHO, 20, av Appia
 CH-1202 Geneva
 Switzerland
info@newspecial.org

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