

## Press Release

# Closer partnership between ETH Zurich and the United Nations

Zurich, 11 October 2023

ETH Zurich and the United Nations have confirmed their desire to work together more closely by signing a memorandum of understanding. The partnership is intended to support the development of technology-based social innovations for addressing global challenges.

ETH Zurich is keen to apply its research expertise and skills in transferring knowledge and technology to help tackle global problems. In this regard, numerous researchers are already involved in successful collaborations with the United Nations (UN), but this collaboration is now being stepped up.

On Tuesday ETH President Joël Mesot and Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General for Policy at the United Nations, signed a joint memorandum of understanding in New York committing the university and the UN to push ahead with the development of technology-based social innovations to overcome global challenges.

“Ever since its foundation, ETH Zurich has been at the service of society. We see it as our honourable duty to apply our know-how more extensively in support of the United Nations’ initiatives to promote peace, security and sustainable development – which are just as indispensable for Switzerland,” Joël Mesot, President of ETH Zurich comments.

Guy Ryder, Under-Secretary-General for Policy at the UN, adds: “Our new partnership with ETH Zurich brings together ETH Zurich’s long-standing expertise in scientific and technological innovation and the UN’s commitment to addressing global challenges, opening avenues for cooperation with ETH Zurich scientists and partners in developing countries to harness research insights for SDG impact – as envisioned in Our Common Agenda.”

### **Added momentum to the 17 UN Sustainability Development Goals**

Some of the challenges noted in the memorandum of understanding include goals such as peace, security and sustainable development – issues the United Nations has been dealing with since its foundation. Here the university’s expertise in the areas of conflict research, development cooperation and

food safety will be combined with its know-how in the AI-supported analysis of large data sets and will increasingly be put at the service of the UN.

One example of this is the analytical software developed by researchers working under ETH Professor Elliot Ash, which helps identify data gaps in reporting on the 17 SDGs. The more complete these data, the more effectively the United Nations can measure progress in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The [SDG Data Availability Monitor](#) and the [Pulse of Progress Report](#) help global stakeholder drive progress and transparency.

### **Joint research initiatives**

At the heart of the collaboration are joint research initiatives intended to produce solutions for concrete challenges faced by the UN. They include, for example, the development of an AI-supported analytical tool to predict the probability of outbreaks of violence.

Another project aims to monitor the destruction of infrastructure in war zones with the help of satellite images. Here too, ETH Zurich researchers use machine learning to identify typical patterns of armed conflict shown in satellite images.

### **Policy consulting and staff exchange**

Where necessary, ETH Zurich researchers will make their expertise directly available to various UN teams. To encourage mutual trust and understanding between the international organisation and the university, fellowship and internship programmes would be further expanded. At management level, the partners will meet once a year to review the progress of the partnership.

### **Further Information**

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