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UNODC: FENDING OFF TRANSNATIONAL THREATS

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND SCIENCE

TSUNAMI AWARENESS: SECONDS COUNT

CHANGING BEHAVIORS AROUND WASTE

HOW UN VOLUNTEERS INSPIRE HOPE

THE MERITS OF A MEDITERRANEAN DIET

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The mission of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) includes tackling the global drug problem, combating organized crime and terrorism, addressing corruption, money laundering and economic crime, and promoting fair and effective criminal justice systems.

UNODC is headquartered in Vienna and was established in 1997 through the merger of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and the Centre for International Crime Prevention. It fulfils its mandate by supporting Member States, criminal justice institutions and law enforcement agencies in three key areas: policy development, research and data analysis, and capacity-building through training and technical assistance.

This issue of the magazine offers an overview of UNODC's work, featuring an interview with its Executive Director, Monica Juma, who took up the post on 11 May 2026, alongside articles highlighting the importance of the Office's activities. These contributions are particularly timely as rapid technological advances have opened up new crime pathways and make it increasingly challenging to combat the very threats UNODC works to keep at bay.

S'attaquer au problème mondial de la drogue, lutter contre la criminalité organisée, prévenir et combattre le terrorisme, ainsi que la corruption, le blanchiment d'argent et la criminalité économique, tout en promouvant des systèmes de justice pénale équitables et efficaces : telle est la mission de l'Office des Nations Unies contre la drogue et le crime (ONUDC).

L'ONUDC a été créé en 1997 à la suite de la fusion du Programme des Nations Unies pour le contrôle international des drogues (PNUCID) et du Centre pour la prévention internationale du crime. Basé à Vienne, l'Office œuvre à la réalisation de son mandat en apportant son soutien aux États Membres, aux institutions de justice pénale et aux services chargés de l'application de la loi dans trois domaines principaux : l'élaboration des politiques publiques, la recherche et l'analyse des données, ainsi que le renforcement des capacités à travers la formation et l'assistance technique.

Ce numéro du magazine se propose de passer en revue l'ONUDC à travers un entretien avec sa Directrice exécutive, Monica Juma, en poste depuis le 11 mai 2026, ainsi que d'autres articles mettant en lumière l'importance du travail de l'ONUDC, notamment à un moment où la révolution technologique facilite la commission de crimes contre lesquels l'Office s'efforce de lutter.

Prisca Chaoui

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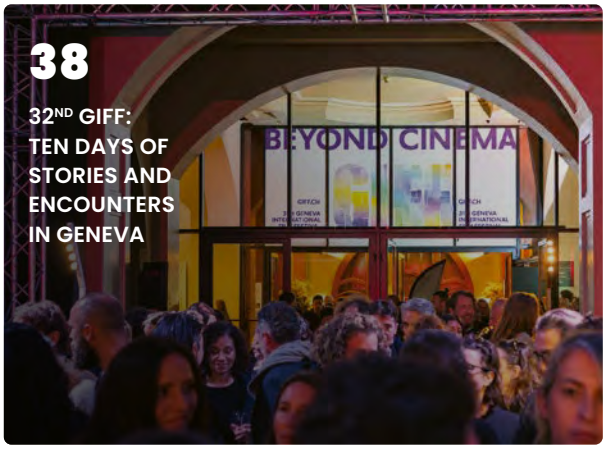
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ULTIMATE TRUST



UNODC's vision in a changing criminal landscape

Monica Juma, Executive Director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, asserts the importance of international cooperation in tackling crime

MOLLIE **FRASER-ANDREWS** *

As Executive Director of UNODC, Monica Juma leads the organization's efforts to support Member States in addressing the interconnected challenges of organized crime, drug trafficking, corruption and terrorism, while strengthening the rule of law and promoting human rights. In this



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interview, she shares the importance of people-centered responses to building safer and more resilient communities.

What do you see as the biggest emerging threat to international efforts against organized crime and drug trafficking?

The biggest threat to the response to organized crime is its nature and scale. Organized crime surrounding drug trafficking is becoming more connected and more sophisticated and is operating at an unprecedented scale and depth.

Technology, including artificial intelligence, is accelerating this shift, enabling criminal networks to operate faster, reach more victims, and adapt in ways that place significant pressure on law enforcement efforts.

Furthermore, we are seeing a growing convergence of crimes; the same networks may be involved in drug trafficking, human trafficking, terrorist financing, online fraud and money laundering. Criminal networks are exploiting connections between these activities and their supply chains to expand their reach and profits.

This means we have to change the manner in which we frame and respond; key to this is strengthening international cooperation and using technology more effectively to stay ahead of criminal networks.

How can countries work together more effectively when criminal networks operate across borders but legal systems remain largely national?

This is an aspect we need to focus sharply on if we are to help countries respond effectively to the realities of crime today. We are seeing criminal networks operate increasingly across borders and jurisdictions, especially in the digital sphere, but our law enforcement systems, legal procedures and institutions are still largely organized nationally. That is the gap we must bridge if we are to secure people, communities and nations.

UNODC plays an important role as custodians of international standards and we have a large presence in the field, working directly with national counterparts and helping to build the relationships and trust that makes cooperation possible. We can also provide platforms and networks to bring different actors to the table, including the private sector and civil society, who have important insights and roles to play but who may not always be part of the conversation.

What role do you think young people can play in preventing organized crime and drug-related harm?

We need to see young people not simply as victims or those we must protect from crime, but as essential partners in preventing and tackling this threat.

Organized criminal groups often target young people, by exploiting their

Fighting transnational threats to security is becoming more and more complex

> UN80 HAS GIVEN US A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO RETHINK HOW TO OPTIMIZE OUR RESOURCES

vulnerability, recruiting them into gangs or forcing them to commit crime. We have to offer a different path that is built on knowledge, positive role models and a sense that there is a place for them in society.

When it comes to drugs, for example, we know that young people talking openly with one another, sharing experiences and raising awareness can make a real difference. At UNODC, we support prevention approaches that give young people the knowledge and space to make informed choices and help their peers.

The same applies to organized crime. For example, at the 15th UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in Abu Dhabi, we saw young people actively engage in discussions and bring their perspectives to the table. They were not simply talking about the future of crime prevention; they were actively helping to shape the responses we need today. That is what we must build on. Young people understand the pressures and opportunities of their generation, especially in today's digital world. We need to listen to them, involve them in decision-making and give them meaningful opportunities to lead.

If we want safer communities tomorrow, we must give young people a real voice in building them today.

UNODC operates in countries with very different political and legal systems. How does the organization ensure that its work protects human rights while supporting governments in combating crime?

The starting point is clear: human rights and security are not competing priorities, they go hand in hand. Without respect for human rights, the rule of law and public trust, efforts to fight crime risk losing their legitimacy and become less effective.

UNODC works with countries with very different legal systems and national circumstances, and we respect those differences, while grounding our work

> "HUMAN RIGHTS AND SECURITY ARE NOT COMPETING PRIORITIES

in the international conventions and standards agreed by Member States, including their obligations under international human rights law.

In practice, this means helping governments strengthen their criminal justice systems in ways that are both effective and fair. It means supporting law enforcement while also strengthening access to justice, promoting due process, improving prison conditions and ensuring that victims are protected, and their rights and dignity respected.

Ultimately, our role is to help countries uphold the rule of law, protect human dignity and strengthen public trust.

How can UNODC ensure that international drug-control policies do not unintentionally worsen inequality?

We have to start by recognizing that drug-related problems do not affect everyone in the same way. The same policy can have very different consequences depending on a person's circumstances, access to healthcare and support, or vulnerability to discrimination. We see this particularly in the barriers facing women and children; stigma, fear of judgement and discrimination can make it harder for them to get the treatment and care they need.

That is why UNODC promotes balanced, comprehensive and evidence-based responses that address all aspects of the world drug problem, from preventing drug use and expanding access to treatment, to tackling drug trafficking and strengthening justice systems.

To be effective, drug policies must consider the people affected by them. Our goal is to ensure that no one is left behind in accessing treatment, protection and justice, and that our responses reduce harm rather than deepen existing inequalities.

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Monica Juma, Executive Director of UNODC, talking to Member States in Vienna

As newly appointed Executive Director of UNODC, what have been your priorities for the first year of your tenure?

My first order of business has been to listen and learn, to hear directly from Member States and our partners about their priorities, to understand where the needs are greatest, and to ask ourselves how UNODC can best help meet them, because our starting point is the people and countries that we serve.

The second is to look hard at how we work. UN80 has given us a unique opportunity to rethink how to optimize our resources, where we can work smarter, and how we can deliver more with what we have. Efficiency is not an end in itself; it must translate into better support for countries and better results on the ground.

And this brings me to my third priority: strengthening UNODC's value proposition and bringing our mandate closer to the people who need it most. Our field presence is one of UNODC's greatest strengths. Since joining UNODC I have had the opportunity to undertake field visits to Haiti and Ukraine, which allowed me to see firsthand the realities our colleagues and national counterparts face in crisis settings and, importantly, the value of our support, especially in fragile contexts.

I want to build on that strength and to connect our expertise across UNODC, as well as with the wider UN system, leveraging the synergies that enable us to scale impact for people on the ground and achieve more together.

It is about making sure that our mandate translates into practical and tangible change for countries, for communities and for the people who count on us. ■

* **Mollie Fraser-Andrews** is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.

UNODC: making the world safer

The challenges of illicit drugs, organized crime, corruption, terrorism, cybercrime and related forms of criminal activity do not stop at borders

REKA **FURTOS** *

As forces undermine security, weaken institutions, fuel violence and threaten development, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is at the forefront of multilateral efforts to help countries prevent and address these interconnected challenges.

Established in 1997 and headquartered in Vienna, UNODC has grown into a global organization with a network of field offices covering more than 100 countries. It is the guardian of nearly universally ratified global conventions that set internationally accepted standards, and the only UN entity with a mandate to prevent and address interlinked drug and crime challenges. UNODC supports Member States through research and analysis, policy advice, norm-setting and technical assistance. Working with governments, civil society, the private sector and other partners, the Office helps translate international commitments into practical action on the ground.

Member States voting at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)

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Global response to the world drug problem

Drug production, trafficking and consumption continue to affect millions of people worldwide, contributing to insecurity, violence and public health challenges. Criminal networks are increasingly agile, taking advantage of globalization, technological advances, and new trafficking routes.

The Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), established in 1946, is the United Nations' principal policymaking body on drug-related matters and oversees the implementation of the international drug control conventions.

UNODC serves as the Secretariat to the CND and supports Member States in addressing the world drug problem through balanced, evidence-based responses.

The Office helps strengthen capacities to detect and intercept illicit drug trafficking, dismantle criminal networks and address emerging threats. It also promotes drug use prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and recovery services, including in prison settings, supports HIV prevention programs, improves access to controlled

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Coffee farmer Vongsone picks ripe coffee cherries, earning more from growing coffee through a UNODC/Laos Alternative Development project than when he grew opium

© UNODC



medicines, and assists communities in developing sustainable alternatives to illicit crop cultivation. Through the annual "World Drug Report" and other research products, UNODC provides data and analysis to inform policymaking and international cooperation.

Tackling organized crime

Transnational organized crime generates billions of dollars in illicit profits every year through activities such as drug trafficking, trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling, firearms trafficking, and crimes that affect the environment. These crimes undermine security and governance, distort economies, and exploit vulnerable populations.

The United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), adopted in 2000, is the primary international legal instrument to prevent and combat organized crime. It provides a framework for cooperation among countries in preventing, investigating and prosecuting serious transnational offences.

Coca cultivation in Nariño, Colombia


© UNODC/ LAURA GIL

Women prisoners have the option to learn vocational skills in prison, among which sewing is a favourite

UNODC is custodian of the Convention and assists countries in strengthening legislation, criminal justice responses and international cooperation. The Office monitors global crime trends and produces research, such as the biennial "Global Report on Trafficking in Persons" and threat assessments that help governments better understand evolving criminal markets and develop effective responses.

A global framework against corruption

Corruption and financial crime divert state resources, weaken public trust, hinder economic growth and erode the rule of law.

Adopted in 2003, the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) is the world's only legally binding international anti-corruption instrument and is the cornerstone of global efforts in this field. UNODC serves as the Convention's secretariat and supports Member States in implementing its provisions including through the Implementation Review Mechanism (IRM), its peer review process. Implementation gaps identified through the IRM directly drive the Office's technical assistance.

The Office helps strengthen anti-corruption institutions, investigate and prosecute corruption and financial crimes, recover stolen assets, promote integrity and transparency. The Global Operational Network of Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement Authorities (GlobE Network) further enhances international cooperation among anti-corruption law enforcement authorities worldwide.

Building safer and more just societies

Preventing crime and strengthening criminal justice systems are essential to building safe, inclusive and resilient societies.

The Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (CCPCJ), established in 1992, is the United Nations' main

policymaking body on crime prevention and criminal justice. Through the Commission, Member States develop common approaches to emerging crime challenges and advance the implementation of United Nations standards and norms.

UNODC supports countries in strengthening crime prevention strategies, improving access to justice, supporting victims of crime, reforming criminal justice institutions including prison systems, police, prosecution services and the judiciary, while enhancing their effectiveness, fairness and accountability. The Office also promotes measures that address the root causes of crime and reduce recidivism, contributing to safer communities and stronger rule-of-law institutions.

Combating terrorism

Terrorist groups continue to adapt their tactics, exploit new technologies and seek new sources of financing and support. Effective responses require strong legal frameworks, international cooperation and respect for human rights.

Grounded in international law and the universal legal instruments against terrorism, UNODC helps Member States prevent and counter terrorism through legislative assistance, capacity-building and technical support. The Office works with criminal justice practitioners, border authorities and other institutions to strengthen national responses, while promoting approaches that uphold the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

Addressing crime in the digital age

Rapid technological change is creating new opportunities for economic and social progress, but it is also providing new tools for criminal activity. Online scams, organized fraud, and other cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent crimes increasingly harm people, businesses and governments across the world.

Recognizing the growing threat, Member States adopted the United Nations Convention against Cybercrime in 2024,

> “
> DRUG PRODUCTION, TRAFFICKING AND CONSUMPTION CONTINUE TO AFFECT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WORLDWIDE

the first comprehensive global treaty dedicated to preventing and combating cybercrime. The Convention provides a framework for international cooperation, information sharing and capacity-building, helping countries respond more effectively to crimes committed in and through digital technologies.

UNODC served as secretariat to the negotiation process and will support implementation of the Convention once it enters into force. Through technical assistance, training and policy support, the Office helps countries detect, investigate and prosecute cybercrime, strengthen digital evidence capabilities and enhance cross-border cooperation.

Looking ahead

As criminal threats become increasingly interconnected and technologically sophisticated, international cooperation is more important than ever. From drug trafficking and organized crime to corruption, terrorism and cybercrime, no country can address these challenges alone.

This year, countries adopted the Abu Dhabi Declaration at the 15th United Nations Crime Congress highlighting how services, infrastructure and technology can be exploited by criminals. In this complex environment, UNODC will continue to provide a global platform for cooperation, helping countries strengthen the rule of law, promote justice and develop coordinated responses to shared threats to contribute to safer societies and sustainable development. ■

* **Reka Furtos** is a Public Information Officer for the Advocacy Section at UNODC.

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Crime's technological revolution and how the world can respond

As criminals harness increasingly sophisticated tools, governments must find equally innovative ways to keep pace

ANGELA **PATNODE** *

Cyber Hub facility in Ukraine

We are living in a technological revolution. Breakthroughs have transformed the fields of medicine, education and science. Information can be shared across the globe in seconds. A tap on a screen can connect us with new people, cultures and ideas.

But while these technological innovations have driven remarkable progress, they have also enabled transnational organized crime groups to operate at a scale and speed unthinkable just a couple of decades ago.

Human traffickers can now use artificial intelligence tools to scrape social media sites to pinpoint the most vulnerable recruits. In areas where they exert de facto

control, drug traffickers can integrate facial recognition software into CCTV networks to detect undercover officers or unmarked police vehicles. Money launderers can purchase "privacy coins," or cryptocurrencies which offer a higher level of anonymous blockchain transactions, to remain untraceable. Scam operations can produce deep-fake videos, images and audio to create highly convincing but fabricated impersonations to convince you to transfer your savings away. Firearms traffickers can print 3D versions of weapons at a fraction of the cost.

The examples may differ, but the pattern remains the same: in every type of crime, technology has made it easier than ever for criminals to reach more victims, move money more quickly and inflict more damage. It has also created openings for new types of crime to flourish, namely cyber-dependent crimes like malware, hacking, distributed denial of service attacks and more, to steal money, data or other valuable assets.

As noted by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in his remarks at the opening for signature of the UN Cybercrime Convention: "The damage [caused by cybercrime] is beyond financial: it erodes trust in our institutions, undermines the rule of law, and causes real-world harm."

How can we respond against such a threat? How can governments, businesses, and individuals protect themselves against such effective, borderless and adaptable criminal business models?

A framework for collective action

Unilateral, under-resourced and uncoordinated action is not an option. "In cyberspace, nobody is safe until everybody is safe," continued Guterres. "One vulnerability anywhere can expose people and institutions everywhere."

The new UN Cybercrime Convention, which opened for signature in October 2025, seeks to provide a framework for the collective global response needed. Many of the obstacles faced by law enforcement when confronting cybercrime are addressed by the Convention, chief among them the sharing of electronic evidence. With perpetrators in one country, victims in another and the electronic evidence stored somewhere else entirely, policing cybercrime can be costly and time-consuming. Moreover, even if an investigator in one country were able to obtain access to evidence in another country, and such evidence electronic data hadn't been already destroyed or deleted, there would be no guarantee that the evidence would be admissible in court.

But with the new UN Cybercrime Convention, States will all define electronic evidence consistently and apply the same standards when collecting such evidence. This means that when one country collects electronic evidence on a cybercrime, such evidence will be admissible in any country in the world who has ratified the Convention.

States will also have access to a 24/7 network to help facilitate urgent requests for information or evidence. They can also use the network to request cooperation on investigations and prosecutions; the identification, freezing, seizure return, etc. of crime proceeds; mutual legal assistance; extradition and more.

As of 30 September 2026, 95 countries have signed the Convention, with three ratifications. The Convention needs 40 ratifications before it can enter into force and will require bold investments of political and financial resources to build capacity for implementation. The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) is already working with Member States to make



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Opening of the UN Convention against Cybercrime in Hanoi, Viet Nam, in October 2025



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Officials from Mozambique's National Institute of the Sea on patrol



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UNODC training in Cambodia on combating cybercrime

ratification as simple as possible, while preparing tailored technical assistance on implementation.

Innovative responses

Legislation needs to be reinforced by forward-thinking and adaptable responses to be effective in the day-to-day fight against cybercrime. Fortunately, the same technology that makes criminals faster and more efficient can also be deployed by law enforcement to fight back.

> "MEMBER STATES HAVE TO FIGHT BACK AGAINST ORGANIZED CRIME

UNODC is also using virtual reality modules to train border management officials to detect smuggled drugs. Officials don the virtual reality headsets and then are immersed in a port or a border checkpoint and must detect the drugs hidden in the containers or vehicles.

Enhanced financial intelligence is essential to counter the concealment, transfer or legitimization of illicit proceeds, which is why UNODC provides national authorities with advanced technical assistance, including on machine learning, crypto-assets, blockchain analysis and more to improve the detection and investigation of money laundering and terrorism financing.

Many transnational organized crimes, from migrant smuggling to the trafficking of drugs, firearms, wildlife and more, happen at sea. UNODC has partnered with Skylight, an online platform that uses artificial intelligence to detect suspicious vessel activity, to introduce the tool to over 40 countries. The technology has already helped countries identify instances of drug smuggling and fisheries crimes.

Artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies can also be used to find human traffickers, including by detecting takeovers of victims' bank accounts, using predictive analysis, merging fragmented data to detect people using multiple identities, natural language processing on adverse media, and more.

These examples represent just a fraction of the sophisticated technological options Member States have to fight back against organized crime. UNODC will continue to work with law enforcement and judicial authorities to equip them with advanced equipment, trainings and digital forensic tools and software that will enable them to address cyber-enabled and cyber-dependent threats and help, in the words of Guterres, "ensure that the digital age delivers peace, security and prosperity for all." ■

* **Angela Patnode** is a Public Information Officer at UNODC.

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A pernicious threat to peace

How we can understand transnational organized crime and the UN's response

ANGELA **PATNODE** *

From trafficking of drugs, weapons, wildlife and people to cybercrime, money laundering, smuggling of migrants and other illicit activities, the threats of transnational organized crime are growing.

Organized crime fuels violence, conflict and instability across borders. No country is immune, and the rapid development of technology is only intensifying the scope, scale and profits of organized crime. The actors may differ – and range from mafia-style groups, criminal networks, gangs, terrorist groups, private sector actors and more, yet share some common characteristics.

All are agile and adapt quickly to evade law enforcement initiatives. They are quick to exploit new technologies or opportunities, as seen with the increasing use of "service providers", or specialized entities that handle a part of the supply chain or cater to money laundering or cybercrime needs.


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Corruption also remains essential to their business models, with organized crime groups abusing legal business structures, including financial systems, and infiltrating State institutions to facilitate their crimes and access profits.

The growing toll

According to research by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), one fifth of global homicides is perpetrated by an organized group each year.

But the impacts of organized crime extend far beyond violence. Their gargantuan profits – drug trafficking alone is estimated to generate hundreds of billions of dollars a year – gives these criminals immense power to infiltrate State institutions or distort legal economies, including by driving up the cost of basic goods and services while creating an unfavourable environment for foreign investment. Such activities can weaken countries' economic outlook, with the Inter-American Development Bank estimating the cost of crime in Latin America at 3.4% of gross domestic product.

Cybercriminals and fraudsters, meanwhile, are bilking individuals and businesses out of their profits and savings, causing economic pain at the individual and community level.

Drug use facilitated by drug trafficking, as well as trafficking in medical products, also threatens public safety and health. To take just one example, as many as 267,000 deaths per year in sub-Saharan Africa were linked to falsified and substandard antimalarial medicines.

Meanwhile, crimes like illegal logging, illegal natural resource extraction, wildlife trafficking and waste trafficking can destroy ecosystems and pollute our water, air and food.

Altogether, the impact of these crimes, and the corruption and financial crimes that enable them, can erode public trust in institutions, shrink civic spaces and deepen inequalities.

UNODC is the UN entity mandated to support Member States to prevent and tackle organized crime. UNODC is Secretariat to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), which provides the means for states to cooperate on combating organized crime threats, namely through extradition requests, joint investigations, mutual legal assistance and more. By helping to align legislation and support cross-border information sharing and coordination, UNTOC is strengthening international cooperation and closing the loopholes that criminals seek to exploit.

UNODC also assists countries on the ground to disrupt criminal operations and confront new threats. Examples of

> "ONE FIFTH OF GLOBAL HOMICIDES IS PERPETRATED BY AN ORGANIZED GROUP EACH YEAR

support include helping 192 border units in 94 countries secure ports, airports and land border crossings against trafficking. Trainings on digital evidence, digital forensics, virtual assets and more help practitioners stay up to date with new technologies and methods to investigate and prosecute crimes. Additionally, information on the latest identifications, seizures and distributions of synthetic drugs helps provide the precise scientific information and alerts needed for countries to respond swiftly to emerging health and security dangers.

A joint UN response

Transnational organized crime is an increasingly complex, multi-dimensional and hyper-globalized challenge, impacting all countries and regions, driving violence and insecurity and harming people and the planet.

Responding to the call of the Secretary-General and the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) for the UN system to work together more coherently to tackle all components of organized crime, UNODC led the development of a UN System Common Approach to Prevent and Address Transnational Organized Crime. Endorsed by the CEB in October 2025, the common approach contains recommendations and joint actions to address challenges and response gaps in the fight against transnational organized crime and to strengthen coordinated and integrated UN support to countries. Furthermore, the common approach outlines six specific joint actions to be undertaken over the next four years, including to enhance data collection and sharing and build capacities to tackle financial crime.

UNODC and UN partners are also working together in regions around the world to strengthen comprehensive responses to organized crime and related threats. For instance, in Haiti, UNODC partnered with the UN Office for the High Commissioner

Illegal waste at a port in Thailand. Waste trafficking is driving toxic pollution and harming public health

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on Human Rights (OHCHR) to support the opening of two specialized judicial chambers: one for complex financial crimes (including corruption and money laundering), and another for mass crimes (including arms trafficking, organ trafficking and sexual violence). In Ecuador, meanwhile, UNODC partnered with the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and UN Women for the "Construimos Paz" project aiming to address the structural causes of violence.

In addition, UNODC developed both a tool to enable law enforcement to identify and map out vulnerabilities, threats and capacities influencing the likelihood of crime within a territory, as well as guides for the design of local security and citizen co-existence plans.

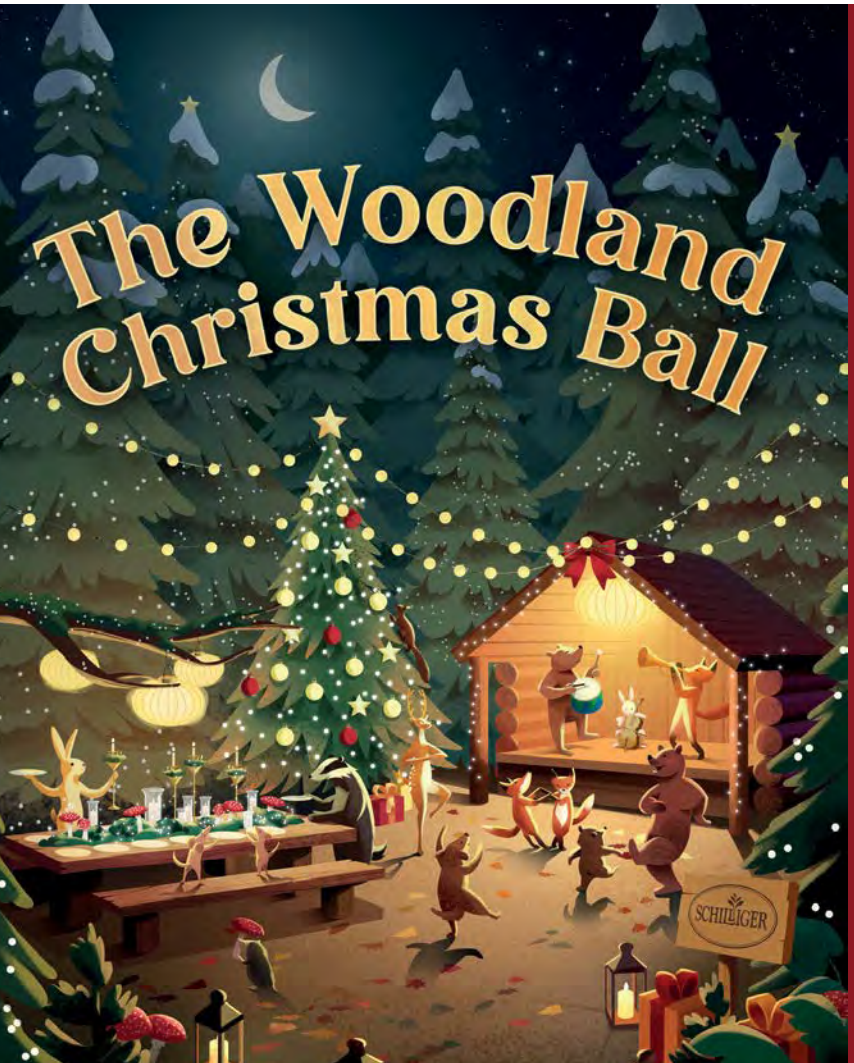
Another recent project in Thailand brought together UNODC, the UN Office on Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) and the UN Office on Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) to improve illicit firearms tracing and evidence collection to help such weapons from being diverted to non-state armed groups, organized crime groups or terrorists. ■

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Methamphetamine markets are expanding around the world

* **Angela Patnode** is a Public Information Officer at UNODC.



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When science becomes a shared human practice

On World Science Day for Peace and Development (10 November), the decisive question is who gets to take part and whose knowledge counts?

AMAL **KASRY** *

A scientific instrument can be precise and still leaves people unseen. A flood gauge may record a rising river, yet say little about who has been displaced, who knows its seasonal moods, or who can turn a warning into safety. Science becomes useful when those questions enter the work.

That is the very idea at the centre of the International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development (IDSSD), which runs from 2024 to 2033 under UNESCO's leadership. Its purpose is to make science more open, trusted and connected to the lives it serves.

From a science divide to a shared endeavour

UNESCO's July 2026 global report describes a movement already larger than a single institution. During the Decade's first two years, nearly 400 initiatives across three global calls across 79 countries mobilized collaboration around all 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The same review warns that the scientific future cannot belong to the few. Sub-Saharan Africa represents 17.5% of the world's population but less than 1% of its researchers.

Those figures point to unequal chances to ask questions, gather evidence, learn skills and influence decisions. The report also says 40% of initiatives identified coordination, rather than funding, as

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Women at the Core: Digital Community Centers for Inclusive Innovation, an IDSSD-endorsed initiative led by New Sun Road Guatemala



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Knowledge, innovation, and collaboration can pave the way for peace and development

their primary barrier. Cooperation is the bridge between a measurement and a public decision.

The initiatives make that bridge visible. Many are still at an early stage. Their significance lies not only in results already achieved, but also in the approaches they are putting into practice: who collects data, who interprets it, who can use it, and what remains when a project ends.

When a watershed is also a classroom

In South Sudan, one Science Decade initiative is responding to a stark information gap: only ten of the country's 113 historically operational hydrological stations remain functional, while floods in recent years have displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

The proposed answer is to make observation a local capability. The initiative plans to train community monitors to use low-cost sensors, combine local knowledge with scientific observation, and connect community data with regional early-warning systems. Women are intended to play a central role in the network.

> COOPERATION IS THE BRIDGE BETWEEN A MEASUREMENT AND A PUBLIC DECISION

What changes when cooperation works? A resident's knowledge can sit alongside a standard measurement. A woman who has watched seasonal change can help shape the method. A trainee can gain a skill and a route into further study.

Openness is about people, not only papers

That question sits at the heart of OSciAfri, a research and training initiative exploring what Open Science can mean in sub-Saharan Africa.

The proposed curriculum goes beyond putting journal articles online. It includes scientific infrastructure, local and Indigenous knowledge, African languages, citizen science and links between research and policymaking. It asks: open to whom?

For a learner, openness may mean training in a language they understand. For a community, it may mean knowledge is not extracted without consent. For a researcher, it may mean access to equipment, data and colleagues. Cooperation links them rather than treating knowledge as a one-way export.

Small experiments, larger dignity

In El Chaupi, a rural highland community in Ecuador, NutriRed 360° starts from another contradiction: food residues and nutritional need exist side by side. The pilot plans to work with youth, women and local producers on solar dehydration, fermentation and other low-cost processes, while residents characterize residues, map

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More than discovery, Science is a force for peace, progress, and human survival

food-waste flows and document help explore how food residues can be transformed.

The planned outputs, open manuals, practical kits and mobile science demonstrations, are designed to make knowledge easy to share and adapt. Researchers and residents are expected to shape questions together, bringing scientific methods alongside ancestral practices and knowledge passed between generations.

The human test of the next decade

A fourth initiative, through education, dialogue and public engagement, aims to bring researchers, decision-makers and under-represented groups into conversations about how these rapidly developing fields affect society.

The example matters because advanced science can become remote from the people it affects. Cooperation can make ethical questions visible: who receives care, who understands the evidence, whose data are protected, and who sets priorities.

Across these efforts, unfinished work is not a footnote. UNESCO's review calls for fairer access to infrastructure and knowledge, links between researchers and decision-makers, public trust, and responsible governance of emerging technologies. It also points towards research rewards that value public benefit, not only publication. The purpose is personal: fewer people should face climate risk, illness, hunger or displacement without evidence and voice.

The soul of the Science Decade is therefore not science speaking louder. It is science learning to listen to a river community, a farmer, a student, a patient, a researcher working in a language too often overlooked. By 2033, its measure should be more than the number of initiatives endorsed. It should be whether more people can help make knowledge, trust it, challenge it and use it to shape a safer future together. ■

* **Amal Kasry** is Chief of Section for Basic Sciences, Engineering, Technology and Innovation at UNESCO.

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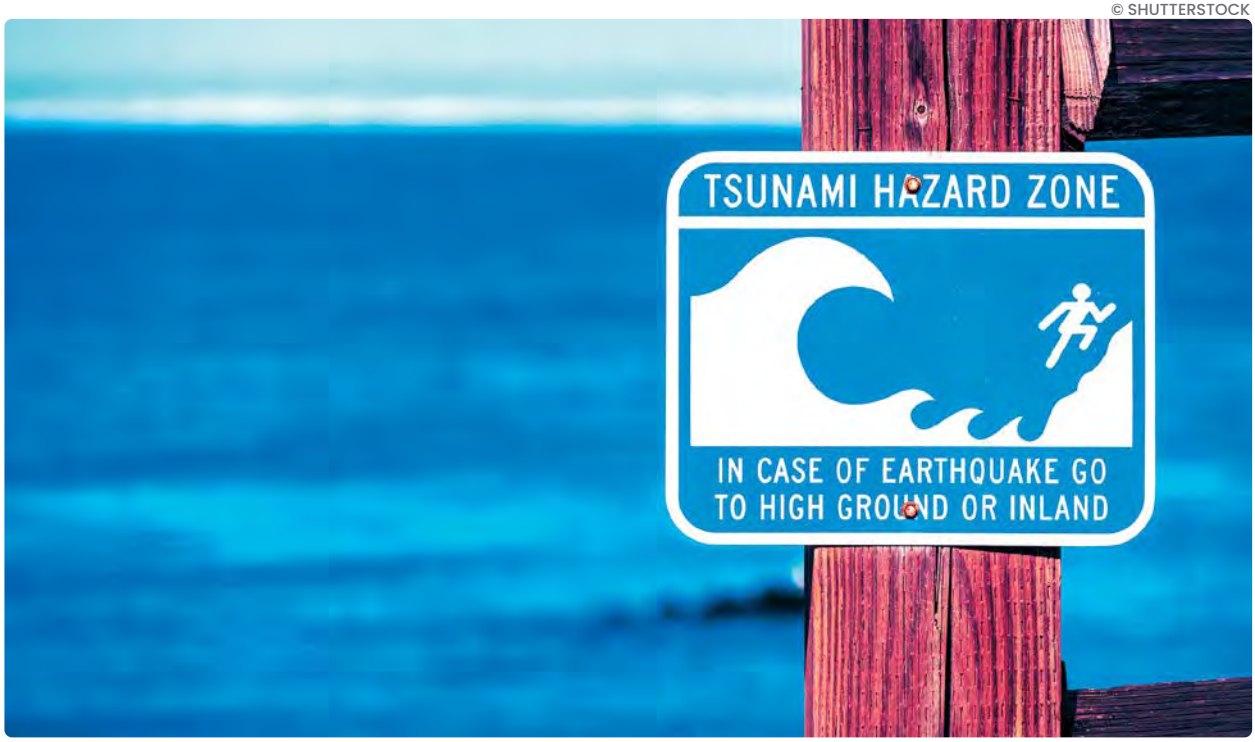
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When seconds count: the Caribbean is getting Tsunami Ready

It is always tsunami season in the Caribbean. Since 2005, countries and territories and their communities have been taking action to save lives

CHRISTA **VON HILLEBRANDT-ANDRADE** *

Know the warning signs and always respect the power of the ocean

Imagine sitting on a tranquil beach when the ground suddenly shakes, or the ocean rapidly rises or retreats exposing the sea floor. Within seconds, the sea could surge ashore, swallowing homes, businesses, and lives.

Tsunamis are swift and uncompromising. When the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami struck on December 26, 2004, it claimed over 227,000 lives across 14 nations, affecting people of 52 nationalities in a matter of hours. From that horrific tragedy, a vital global mission was born: transform vulnerable coastal areas into resilient, fully prepared communities.

Seconds to act: why local readiness matters most

Across the globe, 90% of tsunami casualties are caused by waves that strike shores within minutes to an hour of a very large earthquake, landslide, or volcanic eruption.

Because there is often no time to wait for official alerts, community preparedness is the single most effective tool we have to save lives.

To coordinate this effort globally, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO oversees four warning and mitigation systems spanning the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions, and the Northeast Atlantic and Mediterranean. Through this international network, nations collaborate to share data, speed up detection and forecasts, issue warnings, strengthen emergency communications, map high-risk coastal zones, build clear evacuation plans, and create public awareness.

Turning regional drills into action in the Caribbean

A standout success story in this global effort is unfolding in the Caribbean. Since 2005, the IOC Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (CARIBE-EWS) has streamlined warning, dropping initial alerts to just 5–7 minutes. Every March, hundreds of thousands of emergency authorities and residents have asked themselves a simple question: Are we ready?

Through CARIBE WAVE, an annual regional exercise launched in 2011 by CARIBE-EWS and supported by the International Tsunami Information Center Caribbean Office, the Caribbean Tsunami Information Center, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, and the Central America Tsunami Advisory Center, more than 5.6 million people across the greater Caribbean have practiced taking life-saving action.

Setting the standard: the 12 indicators of readiness

To turn practice into a lasting culture of safety, the IOC established the Tsunami Ready Recognition Programme in 2022 as an international standard. Modeled after the United States National Weather Service (NWS) TsunamiReady® initiative, this voluntary program acts as a practical roadmap for coastal towns. To earn official recognition, a community must meet 12 key indicators, ranging from mapping hazard and evacuation zones and setting up reliable warning systems to installing signage and conducting regular evacuation drills and education campaigns.

The need in the Caribbean is urgent. Over 70 tsunamis have occurred, causing some 4,500 deaths in the past 500 years (NOAA/NCEI). A 2026 study, published in the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, screened 920 coastal communities across 41 Caribbean countries and territories, estimating that roughly 8.1 million people live within tsunami evacuation zones. This estimate counts residents only; the number of people at risk is even higher when tourists and seasonal workers have been taken into account.

Steady progress is being made to protect them. Across 18 Caribbean countries and territories, 76 communities have achieved Tsunami Ready recognition from the IOC or the US NWS.

> “WITHIN THE CARIBBEAN 8.1 MILLION PEOPLE LIVE WITHIN TSUNAMI EVACUATION ZONES



© PERMANENT CONTINGENCY COMMISSION OF HONDURAS (COPECO)



Community of Tornabé, Tela, Honduras celebrating the renewal of its Tsunami Ready recognition in 2026

Early warnings for all—and with all

Crucially, true readiness leaves no one behind. Beginning in Saint Lucia in 2022, efforts have included persons with visual impairments and advocacy groups to make tsunami planning and warnings fully accessible. Today, this work is expanding to include people with all types of disabilities. Their active involvement highlights a fundamental principle: early warning systems must be designed not just for everyone, but with everyone.

Youth and children are also central to this effort, making up the vast majority of participants in the CARIBE WAVE exercises. As Barbuda worked toward Tsunami Ready recognition, primary and secondary students took center stage to share a life-saving message through a vibrant video. Channeling their energy and creativity, they helped write the lyrics, played the instruments, and sang the vocals. By taking ownership of disaster readiness today, these young leaders are helping keep their island safe for generations to come.

Looking ahead: achieving 100% readiness by 2030

The United Nations Ocean Decade Tsunami Programme has set a bold target: 100% of communities at risk worldwide be prepared for tsunamis by 2030. Reaching this goal demands stronger science, detailed seafloor mapping, more observations and deeper research into non-seismic tsunami triggers like volcanoes and landslides, greater awareness and more effective preparedness and response measures.

While international aid, including support from the US Department of State, has been instrumental, over-reliance on external funding is unsustainable. Long-term resilience relies on the integration of Tsunami Ready actions directly into national budgets with ongoing technical guidance from CARIBE-EWS and other key partners such as the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and the International Telecommunication Union.

Earning Tsunami Ready recognition is far more than receiving a certificate to hang on a wall, it is a lifelong commitment to preparedness, with recognition renewed every four years. By uniting international and national experts, local leaders, and everyday citizens, coastal communities will have the tools to take action when the next tsunami strikes. ■

* **Christa von Hillebrandt-Andrade** is the Manager of the International Tsunami Information Centre Caribbean Office, a US-IOC partnership.

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The importance of writing in the age of AI

What happens to democracy when people stop knowing how to use their own words?

ERIKA **STURK,** EVA **LINDGREN,** AND SOFIA **JUSSLIN** *

Democracy requires the active engagement of the people. Threats to democratic processes highlight the urgency of examining the conditions for teaching about, within and for democracy. Part of educating for democracy is teaching critical literacy, which includes both critical reading and critical writing. Generative AI (GenAI) has made the teaching of writing more important than ever. This is key for all students to become writers who want, own and dare to use writing to participate in a democracy, making their voices heard, being capable of contestation and change.

> “GenAI HAS MADE THE TEACHING OF WRITING MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

To learn to write to influence and use the pen or keyboard as a means of expressing power and voice, students need to be taught critical writing. In a theoretical holistic framework for writing and its teaching, writing researcher Ivanič argued that critical writing has connections to power and the political. Those who can write can create and shape information and knowledge. Writing therefore holds power and large responsibility. Writers must adopt a critical perspective on their own text: What am I writing, what do I want to achieve, how do I do it? Managing this, the result can be a powerful message. This means that readers have a responsibility to take a critical stance towards the text, to interpret it and to read into its values. Critical writing is no easy task. Hence, teaching should include how to write with responsibility. Nevertheless, research repeatedly shows that such teaching of writing rarely happens. Teachers receive little help in policy documents, teaching materials and teacher guides on how teaching of socio-political, critical writing might be enacted. In addition to these shortcomings with teaching of writing for democracy, GenAI adds further challenges. In educational contexts, GenAI can help the writer with content and structure as well as produce a linguistically correct text, at least for English and other major languages, where the training of the GenAI has been done on large source materials.

The launch of ChatGPT in late 2022 marked a pivotal point for schools, universities and writing professionals everywhere. Suddenly, anyone with an internet connection and a digital device could access a powerful technology capable of producing written content in seconds. This technological leap has forced educators to rethink not just how students write, but why and for what purposes writing is taught. The changes brought about by GenAI technologies are so significant that some literacy scholars compare them to the invention of the printing press in the 1450s. The implications for literacy practices are immense: Will students still need to master the art and craft of writing, or will GenAI do it for them? What new skills will be required in a world where GenAI technologies can produce essays, stories and reports at the click of a button?

For a while, we have found ourselves in what experts call an “AI summer,” a period of explosive growth, funding and optimism for AI. But despite the excitement, the future of GenAI in education remains uncertain. Over the past three years,

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teachers and academic leaders have debated how to handle the rise of GenAI, whether to embrace it, restrict it or find a middle ground. Policy documents have been written, revised and discussed at every institutional level. The questions that GenAI technologies raise about ethics, morality and even what it means to be human are more profound than anything schools have faced before. Nowhere is this challenge more evident than for writing. As we move forward, we recognize that the conversation around writing and GenAI will be one of the most important debates in education.

But what is writing? All writing researchers would agree that writing is complex. It is not just about producing texts or demonstrating linguistic skills. Writing is about so much more. As writing researchers, we recognize the need for a broader understanding on what it means to write, not least in classrooms shaped by new technologies like GenAI. Traditionally, education has been, and still is, focused on the written product: form, correctness and assessment. But to truly prepare students for the future, we must shift our approach. Writing must be seen as a meaningful process, one that helps students communicate, participate in various domains, learn and think. Such writing gives the writer agency and authenticity.

Overarchingly, we suggest that writing and writing education can be understood to include the intended reader, a purpose, knowledge, feedback and practice, as presented in the illustration. And writing happens with one or several technologies (e.g., pen, paper, computer, keyboard, GenAI). Writing matters in students' lives when they understand the purpose behind their words. When writing has a clear aim, whether it is to inform, persuade or express, it becomes a powerful means for learning and creativity. This sense of purpose can spark inner motivation and unlock creative potential. Equally important is knowing the intended reader. Awareness of and access to readers help students find their unique voice, choose language and style and ensure that their message is understood.

Becoming a confident writer also requires knowledge; not just about language and grammar, but about writing technologies, genres and the writing process, besides

As generative AI transforms how we write, education must ensure that students retain the confidence and skills to think, question, and speak in their own words

© AUTHORS



The art of writing has been transformed in the age of AI

the message or knowledge of the subject. Whether working with or without GenAI, students need to understand how writing works and how their own process unfolds. Practice is key: giving and receiving feedback, learning from mistakes and improving through constructive exchanges. These experiences help writers grow, not only in fluency and accuracy, but also in their ability to participate in different contexts and disciplines.

Teaching students to write creatively and responsibly has become imperative

Writing is about developing an identity as a writer, someone who understands their own process and can make meaning in context. It is about participating actively in work and society, daring to share ideas and connecting with others who share theirs. In a world transformed by GenAI, these skills and the confidence to use them are more important than ever. Without them, there is a profound risk of uncritical use of GenAI and rapid loss of citizens' literacy skills.

As we look to the future, the United Nations and its Member States must recognize that the teaching of writing must be a cornerstone of all levels of education, especially in an era shaped by GenAI, because the ability to write critically, creatively and responsibly empowers individuals to engage in democratic processes, express their perspectives and participate meaningfully in society. While GenAI offers new tools and possibilities, it also raises profound questions about authenticity, agency and the very nature of human communication.

In other words, GenAI has made the teaching of writing more important than ever. ■

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* **Erika Sturk** is an Associate Professor in Language Teaching and Learning at University of Gothenburg, Sweden, **Eva Lindgren** is a Professor at Umeå University, Sweden and **Sofia Jusslin** is an Assistant Professor at University of Helsinki, Finland.



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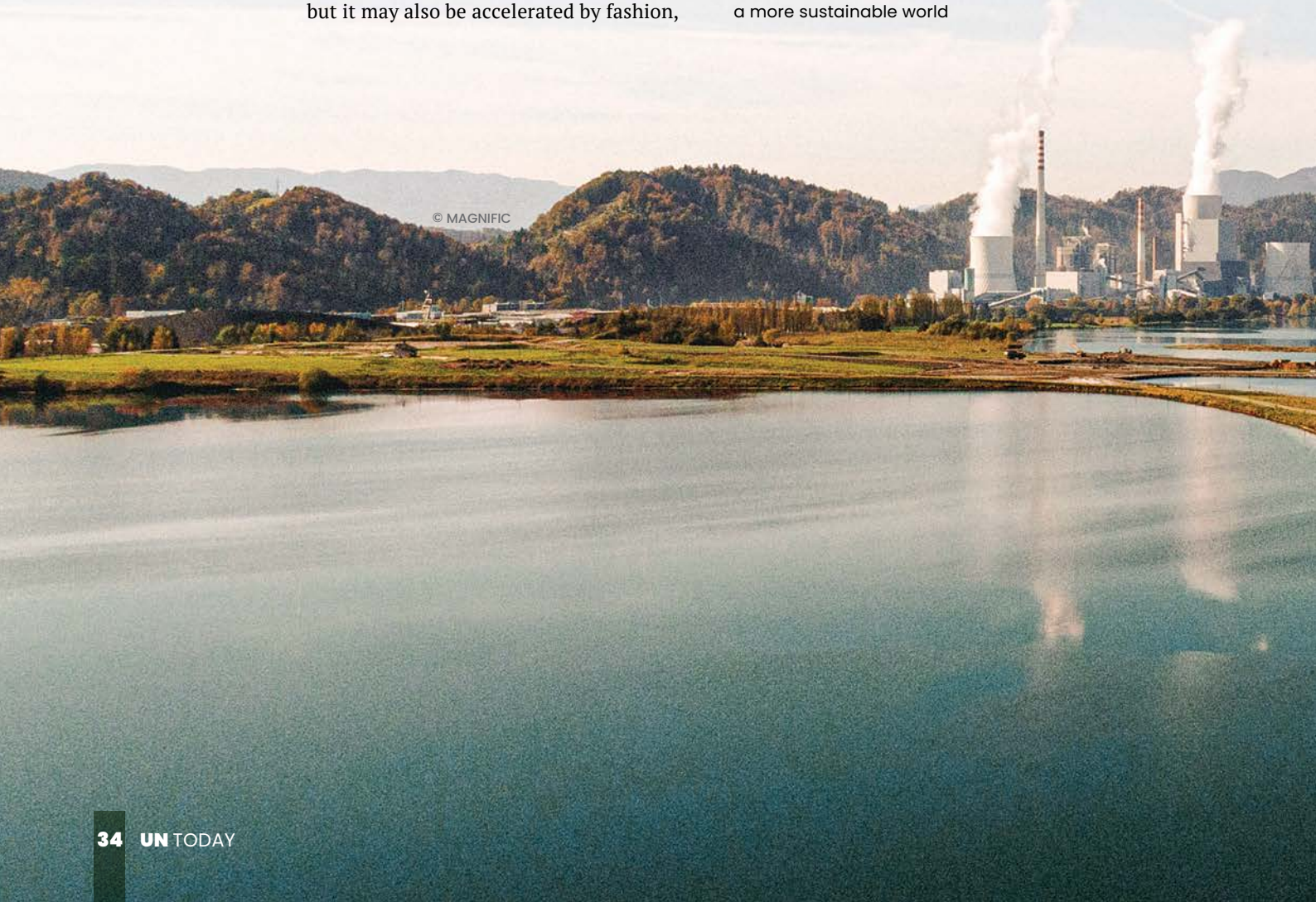
Work and succeed together iil.ch

Why behavioral change matters more than recycling

Recycling manages waste after the damage is done: real environmental change begins long before the bin

SINAN **MERIÇ** *

The environmental history of an object begins long before disposal. A product must be designed, manufactured, transported, marketed and incorporated into daily life. Decisions about material volume, durability, replaceable components, software support and repairability shape its eventual footprint. Replacement may follow genuine failure, but it may also be accelerated by fashion, advertising, technical incompatibility or the perception that an older object has become socially obsolete. Even an exceptionally efficient recycling system cannot retroactively remove the extraction, energy use and unnecessary production embedded in that history.



Energy plants play an important role in recycling waste, reducing landfill use, and supporting a more sustainable world

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The history of plastics illustrates the imbalance. By 2015, approximately 8.3 billion tonnes of virgin plastic had been produced globally. Around 6.3 billion tonnes had already become waste; only about 9% had been recycled, while 12% had been incinerated and 79% had accumulated in landfills or the natural environment. The figures describe more than an inadequate recycling rate. They reveal a material system in which production expanded much faster than the technical and economic capacity to return discarded plastics to productive circulation. The principal question is consequently not how to process a growing volume more efficiently, but how to interrupt the processes that produce that volume.

This is also why waste must be treated as a sociological question. A recycling-centered policy asks people to cooperate more effectively with an existing system: separate correctly, avoid contamination, follow collection schedules and place objects in the proper stream. Those actions matter, yet the production system is largely taken as given.

Food waste demonstrates the importance of this wider perspective. Disposal is merely the final moment in a chain involving purchasing, promotions, package sizes, storage, cooking, portioning, hospitality, care responsibilities and household schedules. Similarly, the infrastructure of "away" allows households to experience disposal as a disappearance. Bins, collection services, landfills and export systems remove material from immediate perception, even though the material continues to occupy land, labor, energy and ecological space. To interrupt wasting, policy must make the earlier stages of the chain visible and govern them accordingly.

Awareness Is a door, not a destination

The environmentally informed polluter poses a central challenge to conventional policy. Many people understand climate change, pollution and resource depletion, yet their conduct remains inconsistent with their knowledge. The information-deficit model assumes that information produces concern and concern produces action. Behavioral research has repeatedly shown that the chain is far less direct. Intention is



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necessary but it is not behavior; routines, price, time, infrastructure, social norms, perceived efficacy and institutional rules mediate the transition from one to the other.

Recycling often succeeds as a low-cost environmental behavior because it can be performed without substantially disturbing established routines. Reduction, reuse, repair and lower-consumption practices may demand more time, planning, money or social deviation. This helps explain why people who recycle may still purchase heavily packaged goods, replace functioning devices or waste food. The apparent inconsistency is not simply hypocrisy. Different behaviors have different barriers and are supported by different material environments.

Circularity without illusion

The circular economy offers a powerful vocabulary, but the circle can become



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> WASTE MUST BE TREATED AS A SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTION

seductive precisely because it appears complete. In actual fact, material systems leak. Energy is required for collection, sorting, transport and reprocessing; quality declines; contamination excludes materials; and secondary supply does not always displace primary extraction. A circle with leakage is a spiral, and the distinction matters because circularity may coexist with growing production and rising material demand.

Collection is not the same as recovery, and recovery is not the same as prevention. A high recycling percentage can be politically attractive while absolute waste, virgin-material demand and packaging placed on the market continue to increase. The shorter loop is usually the stronger loop: avoiding an unnecessary product is generally more effective than recycling it; reuse retains more value than reprocessing; repair preserves the object rather than merely its material.

There are also two forms of rebound. Economic rebound occurs when savings generated by efficiency are spent on other resource-intensive activities. Moral rebound occurs when recycling or another visible green action produces a sense of permission to consume more elsewhere. Neither invalidates recycling. Both demonstrate why downstream success must be connected to absolute reduction, durable products, reuse and sufficiency.

The evidence supports a clear but qualified conclusion. Recycling is necessary, yet it cannot carry the environmental burden alone because it intervenes late in a material chain whose decisive choices have already been made. Behavioral change matters more than recycling when it means changing the practices, infrastructures, institutions and expectations that determine what is produced, purchased, used, maintained and discarded. It is not a synonym for persuasion, nor a demand that individuals solve structural problems through private virtue.

The fact of the matter is that environmental responsibility cannot be reduced to the moment when a person chooses the correct bin. By then, the object's environmental history has already been largely written. Recycling manages a consequence. Behavioral change, when supported by democratic institutions and material infrastructure, can alter the conditions that produce the consequence in the first place. The ultimate aim is not to create a more efficient system for processing ever-growing waste, but to create a society in which far less waste needs to be processed at all. ■

> Recycling translates an abstract concern with pollution into an ordinary routine

> The recycling bin performs an ideological function as well as a technical one

* **Sinan Meriç** is a Historian and Communication Liaison at Association for Community Awareness (ASCOA).

32nd GIFF: ten days of stories and encounters in Geneva

Geneva International Film Festival brings films, series and immersive experiences to life, with Swiss and international discoveries, encounters and free events

AUDREY **OLIVIER MURALT** *

Rounded in 1995, the Geneva International Film Festival (GIFF) returns for its 32nd edition from 30 October to 8 November, 2026. The festival brings together film, series, and immersive art, showcasing Swiss productions alongside European and international works in a program designed to encourage discovery, dialogue, and exchange.

GIFF takes place primarily around Plainpalais, at the Maison Communale de Plainpalais and Théâtre Pitoëff, as well as at Cinémas du Grütli, Cinérama Empire, and Fonction:cinéma. Many screenings are followed by introductions and Q&As with filmmakers, artists, and creators, giving audiences the opportunity to engage directly with the people behind the work.

A program that crosses borders and formats

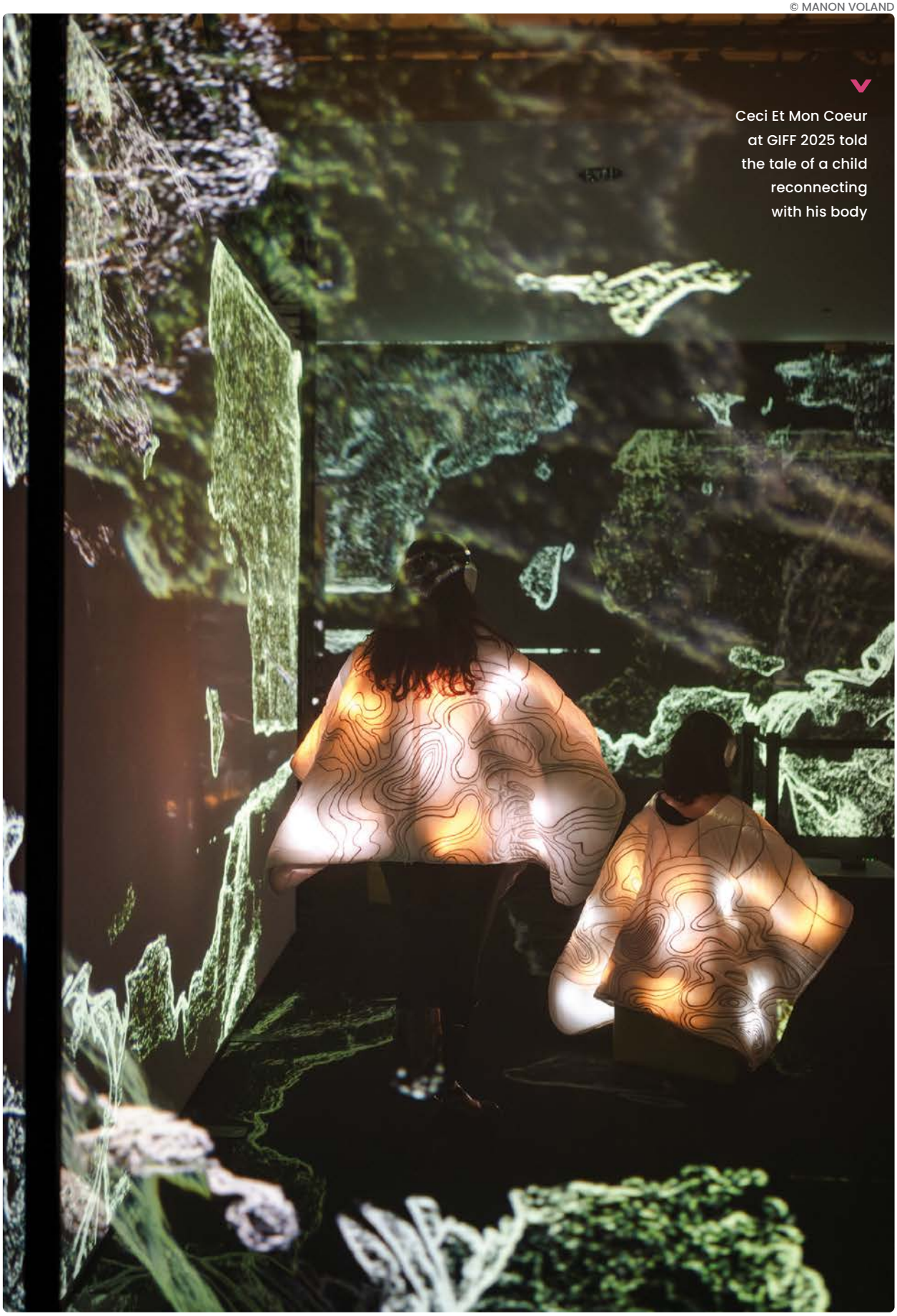
Opening night on 30 October will feature *Tangles*, Leah Nelson's animated feature debut, presented as a Special Screening at Cannes. Adapted from Nelson's graphic novel about her mother's Alzheimer's disease, the film uses humor and black-and-white animation to explore the unraveling of memory. Julia Louis-Dreyfus and Abbi Jacobson lead the voice cast.

The International Feature Competition brings together 10 films, all presented as

Bringing together filmmakers, artists, and film lovers to share creativity, diverse perspectives, and the magic of storytelling



© MANON VOLAND



Ceci Et Mon Coeur at GIFF 2025 told the tale of a child reconnecting with his body

© ANDRÉ CORDELI



Opening Ceremony GIFF 2025

Swiss premieres. Among them, *La Gradiva* by Marine Atlan and *Yesterday the Eye Didn't Sleep* by Rakan Mayasi reflect the breadth of the selection, which spans countries, cultures, and storytelling traditions.

MORE INFORMATION

The full program, schedules and tickets are available at **giff.ch**

Program Announcement
October 8, 2026

32nd edition of GIFF
October 30–November 8, 2026

14th GIFF PRO
November 3–6, 2026

Swiss cinema also has a strong presence in this international lineup. Geneva filmmakers Nicolas Chapoulier and Pauline Julier present *Les Indes*, their first fiction feature, following its screening at the Venice International Film Festival. Co-produced by RTS, the film follows three men transporting a portrait of the Infanta from the Spanish court to that of Louis XIV. It will have its Swiss premiere at GIFF, with the filmmakers in attendance.

The International Series Competition includes *Alice*, created by Claire Lemaréchal and Tim Loane, which chronicles the remarkable life of Alice Guy, from France to the United States. A pioneer and the first female fiction filmmaker in cinema history, Alice Guy was also an artist, entrepreneur, wife, and mother. The six-part series explores her professional struggles, thwarted romances, and lifelong pursuit of freedom and recognition.

Beyond the competitions, the Highlights section brings together a diverse range of

formats and genres. *Ravalear: Not for Sale*, directed by Pol Rodríguez and starring Sergi López, follows a family fighting to save a century-old restaurant in Barcelona's Raval neighborhood. *Everest: The First Ascent*, by Benjamin Auriche and Jean Dellac, brings documentary and adventure together in a story of exploration and endurance.

Immersive work remains a central part of GIFF's identity. In the International Immersive Experience Competition, *Captures* by Geneva-based studio Structurals and DJ Owelle creates an audiovisual environment in which sound and images evolve in real time. The Future Is Sensible Competition looks at technology through social and environmental questions. *Res Natura*, by Mélanie Courtinat and Swiss designer and artist Julien Mercier, reconstructs Swiss landscapes from 3D scans to explore human responsibility for the deterioration of ecosystems.

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Mira Nair: between places and identities

The festival's 2026 Guest of Honor is Indian-American filmmaker Mira Nair, who will receive the Film & Beyond Award. From *Mississippi Masala* (1991) to *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), Nair's work has explored displacement, belonging, and the relationship between private lives and political history.

Her own journey between Delhi, Kampala, and New York gives these themes particular resonance. In 2026, her son Zohran Mamdani became mayor of New York City, adding another dimension to her long-standing exploration of identity, migration, and belonging. Mira Nair will meet with the public at Théâtre Pitoëff on 31 October.

Weekends for all

GIFF KIDS offers families another way to experience the festival. At the Maison Communale de Plainpalais, *Muyi, la légende du village des femmes*, directed by Julien Chheng, is aimed at audiences ages eight and above. In collaboration with Cinémas du Grütli, younger children can discover *Le Noël d'Ernest et Célestine* and Swiss filmmaker Benjamin Botella's *Chasing Horrifox*, both suitable for children ages four and above.

And when the screenings end, the festival keeps going. On Fridays and Saturdays, the free-entry GIFF Nights take over the festival's central venue from 10 p.m. Four nights will explore electronic music and club sounds ranging from gqom and baile funk to R&B, batida, trap, and Afro-inspired sounds, featuring artists from Geneva's local scene, in collaboration with Cavale bookings.

It's another side of GIFF: a festival that extends beyond the screening room, creating space for audiences, guests, and artists to connect, discover new work, and share the experience together. ■

> "A PLACE WHERE AUDIENCES, GUESTS AND ARTISTS CAN MEET BEYOND THE SCREENING ROOM

This article was written in collaboration with the Diplomatic Club of Geneva.

* **Audrey Olivier Muralt** is the Director of Operations at Geneva International Film Festival.



Chronicles of Everyday Diplomacy

ANTOINE **TARDY** *

Suit and flag, the same shade of blue. For nine Secretaries-General in a row, the trousers have come with a tie. ■

PHOTO
ANTOINE TARDY



✱ **Antoine Tardy** is a freelance photographer based in Geneva. **Web:** antoinetardy.com **Instagram:** @antoinetardyphoto

The circle that keeps the world turning

A resolution in New York sparked a global movement, but its real power lies in the millions of volunteers who inspire hope and create opportunity

RABAB **ABDEL HAMID**
AND AYESHA **KHAN** *

This is the year the world took notice of volunteers.

A resolution in New York. Millions of people in action. One global movement that was 25 years in the making.
A flood cuts off a village.
A young person organizes a cleanup campaign in their neighborhood.
A volunteer firefighter rushes toward danger while others are running away.
A football fan arrives in a new country and is greeted by a volunteer who helps them find their way.

Most of these moments never make headlines.

Community volunteers in Zambia

© UNV





Yet every day, they hold communities together. A volunteer helps a child. Years later, that child may become the teacher, nurse, mentor, or community leader who helps someone else. One act of service leads to another. Communities are built this way, through an endless chain of people choosing to show up for one another. It is the circle of life in action, quietly shaping the future, often without recognition.

For years, volunteers have been doing exactly that. They help communities recover from disasters, support education, protect the environment, care for vulnerable neighbors, and build trust where it is needed most. They are often the first to step forward when a crisis hits and the last to leave when the cameras are gone.

In 2026, the world decided it was time to pay attention.

© UNV



A decision that started a movement

The story began in 2023.

That year, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2026 the International Volunteer Year for Sustainable Development, 25 years after the first International Year of Volunteers in 2001.

The message was simple: volunteers are not a side story. They are a vital part of how communities solve problems, recover from crises and create change.

The resolution was backed by 54 Member States from every region of the world, signaling rare global agreement on one thing: volunteerism matters.

Building the momentum

The declaration was only the beginning.

Through 2024 and 2025, the United Nations Volunteers worked with governments, civil society organizations, researchers and communities to prepare for a year that would place volunteers at the center of the global conversation.

The goal was not simply to celebrate volunteering.

It was to change how the world thinks about it.

How do we better recognize volunteer contributions? How do we support volunteers? How do we ensure their work is reflected in policies and decisions that shape communities?

By the end of 2025, the movement was ready.

The world takes notice

In December 2025, the International Volunteer Year 2026 was officially launched at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

At the same time, the 2026 State of the World's Volunteerism Report offered fresh evidence of something volunteers already knew: their contributions are helping build

International Volunteer Year advocacy at the 2026 Afro-Latin American and Caribbean Youth Congress


© UNV

Volunteers supporting persons with disabilities and the elderly at an IVY 2026 event in Thailand

stronger communities, support peace, and improve lives around the world.

But the real story was unfolding far beyond New York.

From large cities to remote villages, volunteers were already turning the International Year into something much bigger than a UN observance.

From resolution to reality

By 2026, more than 60 countries were organizing activities, campaigns and events under the banner of the International Volunteer Year.

Across continents, communities shared stories of people giving their time, skills and energy to tackle local challenges.

Some worked to restore ecosystems.

Some supported children and young people.

Others helped communities prepare for disasters, support migrants, strengthen public services or bring people together across social divides.

Different places. Different challenges.

The same spirit.

The International Year revealed a simple truth: volunteerism looks different everywhere, but its impact is universal.

From the General Assembly to communities worldwide

As momentum for IVY 2026 grew, the message reached some of the highest levels of international leadership. The President of the United Nations General Assembly became a visible champion of the International Volunteer Year, repeatedly drawing attention to the people whose actions rarely make headlines but often make all the difference. By elevating volunteer stories and contributions throughout the year, the President helped turn volunteerism from a topic often overlooked into a global conversation about how communities overcome challenges and build hope together.

A powerful new ally

Then, in May 2026, the movement gained an unexpected champion.

FIFA formally joined the United Nations in supporting the International Volunteer Year.

The connection made perfect sense.

Around the world, football depends on volunteers. Today, FIFA's volunteer community includes more than 2.5 million people. An estimated 50,000 volunteers supported the FIFA World Cup 2026 across Canada, Mexico and the United States.

They welcomed visitors, guided fans, solved problems, and helped create memorable experiences for millions of people.

Their work reflected the same principle at the heart of the International Volunteer Year: when people give their time to help others, communities become stronger.

Powered by people

The International Volunteer Year was never intended to belong to the United Nations alone.

From the beginning, civil society organizations helped shape the movement.

Networks, volunteer organizations, researchers and community groups brought volunteers' voices into the conversation. They organized dialogues, contributed evidence, mobilized supporters and advocated for stronger recognition of volunteer action.

One of the most significant outcomes was a global Call to Action for the Future of Volunteering, developed through partnerships that brought together volunteers, practitioners, policymakers and civil society leaders from around the world.

Together, they asked a simple question: what would happen if the world invested in volunteerism as seriously as it invests in other drivers of development?

The final chapters

Two landmark moments mark the end of the International Volunteer Year. In October 2026, the United Nations launched commemorative stamps honouring volunteers and their contributions around the world.

Then, on 4 December, representatives from governments, volunteer organizations, civil society and the United Nations will gather in New York for the closing event.

There will be stories.

There will be celebrations.

There will be reflections on a remarkable year.

But the most important conversation will be about what comes next.

The real legacy

The success of the International Volunteer Year will not be measured by the number of events held or speeches delivered.

It will be measured by what remains after the banners come down.

Will governments better recognize volunteer contributions?

> VOLUNTEERISM LOOKS DIFFERENT EVERYWHERE, BUT ITS IMPACT IS UNIVERSAL

Will communities invest more in volunteer programs?

Will more people have the opportunity to contribute their time and skills?

Will volunteerism become a stronger part of how societies respond to the challenges ahead?

Those questions matter because the world is not running out of problems. It is running short of solutions that bring people together.

Volunteerism does.

That is why the story of IVY 2026 does not end in December.

Because long after the commemorative stamp is issued and the closing ceremony concludes, volunteers will still be there. Responding to disasters. Supporting neighbours. Protecting communities. Creating change.

As they always have.

The difference now is that the world is finally paying attention.

Volunteerism is the circle of life in action: people lifting others, who go on to lift others in turn.

Long after the banners come down and the celebrations end, that cycle will continue.

Because the true legacy of IVY 2026 is not a year. It is a chain of human action that keeps moving forward, generation after generation, quietly shaping a more hopeful world. ■



These stamps were designed to honour volunteers as part of International Volunteer Year

Rabab Abdel Hamid is the Communications Specialist for IVY 2026 and **Ayesha Khan** is the Communications Specialist at UNV.

An island of light, a crossroads of cultures

Artist Josefina Stagnaro makes the case for craftsmanship as an art form in its own right

FRANCESCA **LUALDI** *

Long before craftsmanship became a category worth defending, Venice had already made it a way of life: a city stitched together not only by its canals but by its *botteghe*, the workshops where master and apprentice worked side by side, where the line between "artist" and "artisan" was not yet a line at all.

In the medieval and Renaissance city, the Arti, or guilds, organized almost every trade that touched beauty: glassmakers, gilders, woodcarvers, weavers of damask and velvet, makers of lace and mirrors. Painters trained inside workshops that were, in every practical sense, artisanal enterprises: pigments ground by hand, panels prepared by apprentices, techniques passed down through repetition long before they were theorized. Titian ran a *bottega*, not a studio in the modern, solitary sense of the word.

Craft in Venice was never purely local. For centuries, the city was the hinge between East and West, the port where Byzantine, Ottoman, Arab, and European worlds met, traded, and quietly taught one another how to make things. Murano glassmaking owes debts to techniques and materials that traveled from Byzantium and the Levant; the city's mosaics carry the hand of Byzantine craftsmen; and its textiles, patterns, and architecture absorbed motifs carried along trade routes through Alexandria, Constantinople, and beyond.

Venice's wealth was not only in what it bought and sold, but in what it learned to make differently because of whom it traded with. That refusal to separate maker from artist is precisely the spirit that Homo Faber 2026: An Island of Light carried into its fourth edition, on the island of San Giorgio Maggiore earlier this year in September. Organized by the Michelangelo Foundation for Creativity and Craftsmanship together with the Fondazione Cologni dei Mestieri d'Arte and the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, the exhibition transformed the Palladian cloisters and monastic halls of the Cini Foundation into a stage for hundreds of master artisans and emerging talents from around the world.

© JOSEFINA STAGNARO



Josefina Stagnaro with her Herons

© CLAUDIO SCHWARZ



Isola di San Giorgio Maggiore

Among the artisans that exhibited this year was Josefina Stagnaro, a paper artist whose work reconstructs animals of the Argentine Pampas, including herons, ñandú, and gray foxes, feather by feather and fiber by fiber, out of paper.

Many of her subjects belong to the Pampas ecosystem where she grew up, and not all are thriving."The ñandú is threatened locally because of habitat loss," she said. "However, whether a species is threatened or not, I like to think of my work as a tribute to nature."

She chose the ñandú at the beginning of her path as a paper artisan, drawn to the way "its rich plumage textures allowed me to explore different ways of working with the material." Native species of the Pampas remain at the center of her practice today.

"I learn much more during the process of creation," she explained, "because in the making of the structures, I need to think about how the parts are anatomically assembled in the animal and try to represent them in the most accurate yet aesthetic way possible. This results in a deep study of animals anatomically, physiologically, and behaviorally. Even though not all the acquired knowledge ends up being represented in the piece, it is more fun to learn this way."

On where she believes craftsmanship itself is heading, Stagnaro was equally direct: "I believe a great future lies ahead for craftsmanship. Handcrafted work, which takes time to make, will be increasingly valued, in contrast to a culture of the immediate, the ephemeral, and the disposable."

Her answer, that patience itself is becoming a form of knowledge, could stand as a motto for Homo Faber as a whole. Her ñandú, assembled feather by paper feather, is not so different in spirit from a Murano glassblower's decades of apprenticeship or a Venetian gilder's inherited, undocumented technique. All three treat time not as an obstacle to the work, but as part of what the work means.

Venice built its identity on the premise that beauty and utility, art and labor, could share a workshop, and that encounters between cultures could be worked into the material itself rather than kept at arm's length. Homo Faber, nine centuries later, makes the same argument from a stage overlooking the lagoon.

Between the glassblowers of Murano and the paper ñandú of the Pampas, the message is consistent: what the hand makes slowly, it also makes lastingly; craftsmanship has always traveled between cultures more easily than borders would suggest; and in an age optimized for speed and division, that may be its most radical and necessary lesson of all. ■

> "CRAFTSMANSHIP HAS ALWAYS BEEN ONE OF HUMANITY'S MOST RELIABLE MEETING POINTS

* **Francesca Lualdi** is a Partnerships and Communications Specialist with experience in the private sector and the UN system.



The Mediterranean diet is a way of belonging

The International Day of the Mediterranean Diet on 16 November connects culture, biodiversity and the right to healthy food

PIETRO **PARISI** *

When we speak about the Mediterranean diet, we often begin with a list: olive oil, vegetables, legumes, grains, fruit, fish. All of this is true, but it is not the whole truth.

The Mediterranean diet begins long before a plate reaches the table. It begins in a field, in a season, in the hands of a farmer, in the knowledge of a fisherman, in the patience of someone who waits for a tomato to become ripe instead of asking nature to hurry.

It continues in the kitchen, where food is transformed with intelligence rather than excess, and it reaches its fullest meaning when people sit down and share it.

For me, this is why the word "diet" can be misleading. Its deepest meaning is closer to a way of life.

UNESCO recognised the Mediterranean diet as Intangible Cultural Heritage of

© SHUTTERSTOCK



Fresh ingredients, vibrant flavors, and timeless traditions come together on a Mediterranean plate

Humanity because it is not simply a nutritional model: it is a collection of knowledge, rituals, traditions and skills transmitted from one generation to another. It is also a culture of hospitality, dialogue and respect for diversity.

I am a chef, but I have always felt more comfortable calling myself a "cuoco contadino," a farmer-chef.

Those two words remind me that cooking does not begin with the chef.

Before us come the soil, the water, the seed, the season and the people who work the land.

The Mediterranean table was born from this humility.

Many of its most extraordinary dishes were not created from abundance, but from necessity. Bread that was no longer fresh was not discarded; it became another dish. Vegetables were cooked according to the season. Legumes provided nourishment to entire families.

Leaves, stems and imperfect produce were often given a second life.

What today we call "zero waste" was once simply common sense.

And this, perhaps, is one of the greatest lessons the Mediterranean can offer the future.

We live in a time when food is increasingly photographed, marketed and consumed as an object. Yet food is never only an object.

Behind every ingredient there is land, water, labor, culture and time.

Wasting food therefore means wasting far more than the food itself.

The Mediterranean way teaches us the opposite: to use what we have, to respect what grows and to waste as little as possible.

Its benefits are also connected to this balance.

© PIETRO PARISI



Working the land: the knowledge and daily care behind Mediterranean food culture

A traditional Mediterranean pattern places vegetables, fruit, pulses, cereals and olive oil at the heart of everyday eating, with fish, dairy and meat consumed in different proportions according to local traditions.

But I believe its strength is not found in one "miracle" ingredient.

Its strength lies in the relationship between foods, people, place and rhythm.

FAO has described sustainable diets as diets that are healthy while also respectful of biodiversity and ecosystems, culturally acceptable, accessible and economically fair.

This is where the Mediterranean model becomes especially relevant today.

It can connect nutrition with environmental responsibility, local economies and the protection of rural communities.

Biodiversity, in particular, is not an abstract word to me.

When a local variety of bean disappears, when an ancient fruit tree is abandoned, or when a small farmer can no longer afford to cultivate a traditional product, we do not lose only an ingredient.

We lose a piece of memory and a possible answer to the future.

For this reason, protecting biodiversity also means protecting culture.

The future of food cannot be built by making everything taste the same.

It must be built by defending differences.

The Mediterranean has always been a place of encounters. Ingredients, techniques, languages and traditions have traveled across its shores for centuries.

Its cuisine belongs to no single person.

It is a conversation between peoples.

Perhaps this is also why the Mediterranean table carries such a powerful message today: identity does not have to create distance. Strong identities can meet, exchange and enrich one another.

A shared table can do what politics sometimes struggles to do: create a space where people recognize each other.

There is another aspect we must not forget.



Olive groves are a symbol of Mediterranean heritage, patience, and a way of life passed down through generations

Healthy and dignified food cannot become a privilege reserved for those who can afford luxury ingredients or fashionable restaurants.

Some of the foods that best represent the Mediterranean — bread, pulses, seasonal vegetables, grains, olive oil — come from traditions in which nourishment had to be simple, intelligent and accessible.

We should never confuse simplicity with poverty.

Simplicity can be knowledge.
It can be wisdom.

A piece of good bread with olive oil may carry more truth than a plate filled with expensive ingredients and no story.

As chefs, we have a responsibility. We can choose to make food only spectacular, or we can also make it meaningful. We can give visibility to small farmers. We can teach younger generations that an imperfect vegetable is still food. We can preserve recipes that are disappearing. We can reduce waste. We can remind people that the value of an ingredient is not determined by its price.

But this responsibility cannot belong to chefs alone.

I believe that today a sovereign state should be judged not only by the quality of its roads, its infrastructure or the strength of its economy, but also by its ability to guarantee every citizen access to an essential basket of healthy, nutritious and quality foods at fair conditions.

The right to eat well cannot depend on a family's income.

Healthy food must no longer be a privilege. It must become part of the dignity of every human being.

> THE RIGHT TO EAT WELL CANNOT DEPEND ON A FAMILY'S INCOME

Guaranteeing access to bread, pulses, grains, vegetables, fruit and other essential foods means investing not only in health, but in the future of society itself.

On 16 November, the International Day of the Mediterranean Diet gives us an opportunity to celebrate this heritage.

But celebration is not enough.

A heritage survives only when it remains useful, living and capable of speaking to the future.

The Mediterranean diet should not become a postcard from the past.

It should become a tool for tomorrow: a way to protect biodiversity, strengthen local communities, educate against waste, improve nutrition and restore a more human relationship with food.

The greatest lesson I have learned from the Mediterranean is very simple:

Take only what you need.
Respect what you receive.
Transform it with care.
And share it with others.

Because food is not only what keeps us alive.

Food tells us how we choose to live together. ■

* **Pietro Parisi** is an Italian Chef and Mediterranean Food Ambassador, known as the "Cuoco Contadino."



© SHUTTERSTOCK

Ultimate trust

No referees, no gender divisions, barely any equipment: ultimate is a wonderfully simple sport

RICHARD **TURNER** *

Ultimate is a sport without referees. Under a code called "Spirit of the Game," players call their own fouls, resolve disputes mid-play and prioritize fair play over winning at any cost. It is, whatever else it is, an unusually trusting way to spend a Saturday afternoon.

The governing rules put it plainly: the game "relies upon a spirit of sportsmanship that places the responsibility for fair play on the player." It assumes no one will intentionally break a rule, and asks anyone managing a dispute to be fair, honest and courteous to their opponent. Sure, some elite tournaments now use neutral "observers" as a last resort when players can't agree, but this is the exception. On an ordinary field, the players sort it out themselves.



© JEFFREY F LIN / UNSPLASH

Players converge on the disc during a pickup game

From pie tin to world championship

The disc itself predates the sport by at least three decades. Yale students in the 1930s started tossing empty tins from the Frisbie Pie Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and by 1955 the toy designer Walter Morrison had developed a plastic version he called the Pluto Platter. Wham-O bought the rights in January 1957 and renamed it frisbee, after the name college students were already using.

The game began in 1967-68 at Columbia High School in Maplewood, New Jersey, where student Joel Silver introduced it to the student council. The first recorded match, in 1968, saw the council play the staff of the school newspaper. Buzzy Hellring and Jon Hines helped Silver formalize the rules in 1970, and the sport spread quickly through American universities. Rutgers vs. Princeton was the first intercollegiate game in 1972, then the disc, through national federations, landed in Sweden (1974), Japan (1975), Australia (1976) and Belgium and Austria (1977).

The World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF), the sport's international governing body, was founded in 1984 and now counts 126 national federations among its members. The International Olympic Committee recognized the WFDF in 2015, and ultimate was under consideration for the Los Angeles 2028 Games before being dropped from the shortlist in 2022. This is a sport still waiting for its Olympic moment, despite the first World Championships being held in 1983, in Gothenburg, Sweden.

And yes, the sport's own name is a small act of deference to a trademark: the term frisbee belongs to Wham-O, so what's actually played is instead officially called "ultimate," frisbee or not.

© RAPHAEL NAST / UNSPLASH



Two players go up for the disc

© CHRIS F / PEXELS



Why not try a sport that only requires good teamwork and a friendly competitive spirit?

How the game actually works

A full game is played seven-a-side on a rectangular field about 100 meters long and 37 meters wide, with an 18-meter end zone at each end, a familiar setup for anyone who ran around a rugby or American football field. A team scores by catching the disc, while it is in the air, inside the end zone it is attacking. The rules cap a side at seven on the field and set five as the minimum, so there's room for a casual pickup game with whatever numbers turn up.

As with basketball, there is no running with the disc. If you catch the disc, you plant your foot and can pivot, as in netball, and you throw within ten seconds, counted aloud by the nearest defender. Let the count reach ten before releasing and you lose possession. It also changes if you drop it, or on an interception or the disc going out of bounds, which, with no contact allowed, makes the game considerably gentler on the body than it might appear.

> "JUST A DISC, A STRETCH OF GRASS AND A WILLINGNESS TO REFEREE YOUR OWN GAME

The disc is standardized too: competition play uses a 175-gram model, adopted as the sport's standard in the 1980s and written into the rules in 1991, so a disc bought for a casual throw in the park is built to the same spec as one used at a world championship. And actually throwing the disc? Most players start with the backhand and forehand, or "flick" – one off the hip, the other snapped off two fingers and the thumb – and can spend years refining these basics. More advanced players may add a hammer, thrown upside-down over a defender's reach.

An easy sport to fall into

None of this requires a club, a court booking or specialist kit. You have a disc, a reasonably flat stretch of grass

and enough people for two small teams? Great, you're playing ultimate.

Mixed play is also somewhat more evolved than other sports: each team fields seven players with at least three of each gender on the field at once, so this isn't a separate category bolted onto the men's game, it is the original format itself, from casual pickup groups up through the World Ultimate Championships.

Ultimate is also forgiving on the body: there's no body-checking and little of the contact risk that comes with most team sports, which keeps it open to a wider range of ages and fitness levels. No club membership on the scale of a golf course, no court booking, no season ticket. Just a disc, a stretch of grass and a willingness to referee your own game.

Get started

This is a cheap sport to take up. One disc between a few people is enough to learn the basic throws, and a full pickup game needs only two sets of markers for end zones and around ten to fourteen players split evenly. Most cities with a large international population already have some kind of ultimate scene, from club-level teams down to informal weekend pickup groups, but none of that is a prerequisite.

And heading into winter doesn't mean waiting until spring. Indoor ultimate is its own format: five players a side, played on a basketball court with end zones just two to three meters deep, the walls doubling as boundaries. The stall count drops to seven seconds, points restart without a pause, and substitutions run on the fly, hockey-style. It's how clubs keep a season going through the colder months. ■

* **Richard Turner** is a regular contributor and Editor at UN Today.

MORE INFORMATION

If you're in or around Geneva, check out the Wizards or Swiss Ultimate (both in French/German)

www.
wizards.ch
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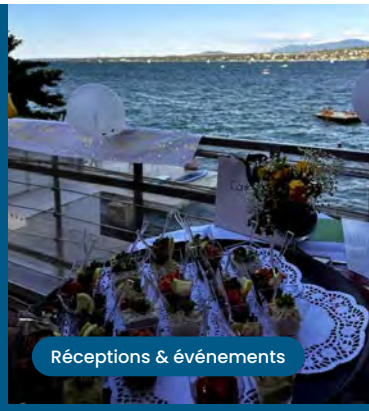
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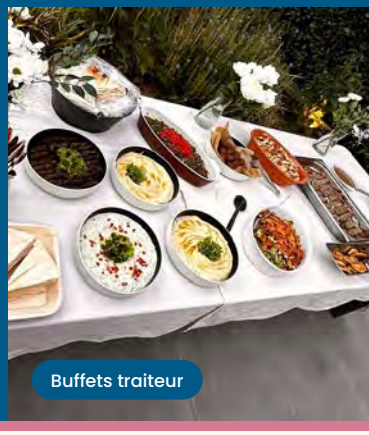
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