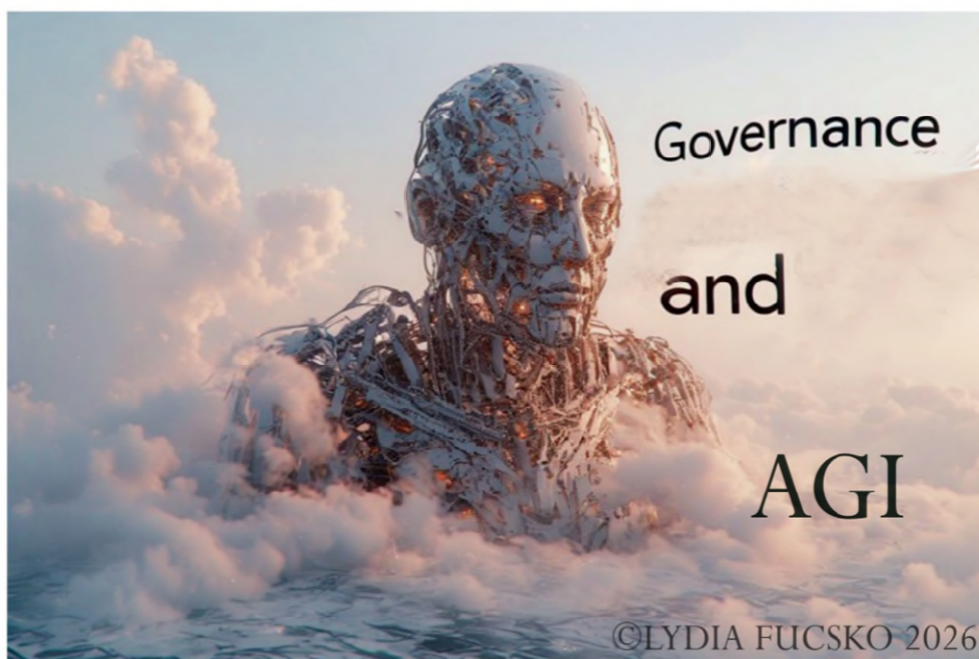


A Necessary Precaution: Anticipatory Governance and the Case for a United Nations Special Session on Artificial General Intelligence

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Abstract

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) represents a potential transformation in technological capability with far-reaching implications for human systems, institutions, and global stability. While contemporary artificial intelligence systems remain domain-specific, AGI is widely understood as capable of general reasoning, autonomous problem-solving, and recursive self-improvement. This paper evaluates a formal open letter issued through the Club of Rome calling for a United Nations General Assembly special session on AGI. It argues that this intervention reflects an emerging expert consensus regarding both the opportunities and existential risks associated with advanced AI. Drawing on foundational literature, institutional reports, and contributions from global futures research networks such as the Millennium Project, the paper contends that current governance timelines are misaligned with technological acceleration.

By examining AGI's distinctive capabilities and associated systemic risks, it demonstrates that anticipatory, multilateral coordination is necessary to ensure AGI development remains aligned with human values and long-term civilizational resilience.

Keywords: AI governance; AI safety; anticipatory governance; artificial general intelligence; Club of Rome; existential risk; global coordination; Millennium Project; United Nations

1. Introduction

The acceleration of artificial intelligence development has intensified the need for governance frameworks capable of addressing emerging risks and opportunities. While most current systems remain narrow in scope, the prospect of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) introduces the possibility of a fundamental shift in technological capability.

A recent open letter published by the Club of Rome calls for a dedicated United Nations General Assembly session on AGI. The letter argues that global coordination is urgently required to maximize benefits while mitigating risks before such systems reach maturity. This paper evaluates that call as a credible and necessary intervention within the broader context of anticipatory governance. Specifically, it examines AGI's unique technical characteristics, associated risks, and implications for international governance structures.

2. From Narrow AI to General Intelligence

Contemporary AI systems are highly effective within defined domains but lack general reasoning capabilities. AGI, by contrast, is expected to operate across domains, generate novel solutions to novel problems, and potentially improve its own architecture. These capabilities include advanced reasoning, autonomous learning, and adaptive problem-solving beyond the scope of current systems.

As outlined in the open letter, more advanced systems may be capable of rewriting their own code, raising the possibility of autonomous goal formation beyond direct human control. This represents a qualitative shift with profound implications for governance, safety, and alignment.

3. Risk, Uncertainty, and Expert Consensus

The open letter reinforces a growing body of expert concern regarding the risks associated with advanced AI. A widely cited statement coordinated by the Center for AI Safety asserts that mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be treated as a global priority.

Leading figures such as Geoffrey Hinton, Yoshua Bengio, and Stuart Russell have publicly warned of the potential for catastrophic outcomes if AGI systems are not properly governed. These warnings emphasize existential risks and underscore that technical progress alone cannot guarantee safety. The letter further cites probabilistic risk assessments and highlights that these concerns originate within the technical community itself.

This challenges the assumption that risks will be resolved incrementally. Instead, it highlights unresolved questions surrounding **alignment, controllability, and emergent behavior** in increasingly capable systems.

4. Global Governance and Anticipatory Strategies

The inclusion of contributors such as Jerome C. Glenn underscores the connection between AGI governance and broader futures research. The Millennium Project has long examined global systemic risks and policy responses, including the governance of transformative technologies.

Recent work by Glenn and collaborators emphasizes the need for international coordination, scenario planning, and institutional preparedness. These contributions reinforce the open letter's central claim: governance must evolve in anticipation of technological change, not in reaction to it.

The concept of **anticipatory governance** provides a critical framework for understanding the urgency of the open letter's recommendations. Rather than responding to crises after they occur, anticipatory governance seeks to identify and mitigate risks in advance. The letter highlights a key structural issue: the mismatch between the speed of AI development and the pace of international policymaking. While AI systems may evolve rapidly across successive generations, global institutions often require extended periods to coordinate and implement responses.

This temporal asymmetry increases the likelihood that governance mechanisms will lag behind technological capabilities, thereby amplifying systemic risk. Historical examples from biotechnology and nuclear technology illustrate how delayed governance can exacerbate global risks.

5. The United Nations and Global Coordination

The call for a United Nations General Assembly special session reflects recognition that AGI governance is inherently global. The United Nations remains one of the few institutions capable of convening states, industry, and civil society at scale.

The open letter also references the establishment of international expert panels and ongoing UN initiatives. However, it argues that AGI-specific risks require greater prioritization and more immediate engagement at the highest levels of global governance. A dedicated session would serve to:

- **Increase awareness among policymakers**
- **Facilitate cross-sector dialogue**
- **Accelerate the development of shared governance frameworks**

6. Reflection for Public Readership

There is a growing conversation about artificial intelligence that often swings between excitement and dismissal.

On one side, AI is seen as the key to solving humanity's biggest problems; on the other, concerns about its risks are sometimes brushed off as science fiction or unnecessary fear.

The open letter calling for a United Nations discussion on advanced AI takes a different approach. It doesn't argue against progress; it asks a simpler but more important question: **what happens if we move too fast without thinking ahead?**

Most AI systems today are tools—they help write, analyze, diagnose, and predict. But **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)** refers to systems that could think, learn, and solve problems across many areas—potentially at or beyond human levels.

That kind of shift isn't just another upgrade. It would change how decisions are made, how economies function, and possibly how power is distributed globally. What makes this moment unusual is who is raising the concern: **some of the most prominent AI researchers themselves.**

The letter's main idea is straightforward: **start global conversations before the technology reaches a point where decisions become harder to reverse.** The United Nations is suggested as the place for that conversation because AI isn't confined to one country or one company.

Technology moves quickly; institutions move slowly. That gap can matter. If powerful systems are developed faster than we can agree on how to manage them, we may find ourselves **reacting instead of preparing.**

The letter ultimately calls for **responsibility, not fear.** Progress should include building capable systems while ensuring they are safe, aligned with human values, and governed in ways that benefit everyone.

7. Academic Reflection

The open letter addressed to UN senior leadership constitutes a **time-critical intervention** into one of the most consequential governance challenges of the twenty-first century: AGI. Its argument is that the international community must proactively convene **before AGI capabilities outpace existing regulatory, ethical, and institutional frameworks.**

AGI represents a **categorical, not incremental, transformation.** It denotes systems capable of general reasoning, adaptive problem-solving, and potentially recursive self-improvement. **Failure to foreground this distinction has contributed to widespread conceptual complacency in public and policy discourse.**

The letter adopts a balanced tone: neither alarmist nor complacent. AGI is presented as a **dual-use civilizational technology**, offering unprecedented advances while introducing non-linear, difficult-to-reverse risks.

Grounding in expert consensus strengthens the letter. Concerns are disproportionately concentrated among those with the deepest technical insight. The letter challenges assumptions of controllability and emphasizes **the need for deliberate, pre-emptive safeguards.**

By calling for a special session of the UN General Assembly, the authors recognize that AGI governance is inherently a **global coordination problem**. Fragmented governance risks regulatory arbitrage, strategic instability, and amplified systemic risk.

The letter exemplifies **prudent anticipatory governance**, seeking action before crisis conditions emerge. It maintains **epistemic discipline**, justifying precautionary action without sensationalism. AGI development should be measured by alignment, safety, and societal integration, not capability alone.

The endorsement of the UN High-Level Expert Panel further strengthens credibility. The proposed session is not reactive but a **necessary acceleration of recognized priorities**, ensuring collective action before technological trajectories become locked in.

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For the Get to the Point Reader: Why We Need a Global Conversation on Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)



Artificial intelligence (AI) is advancing rapidly. Today's systems are **tools**—they assist with writing, analysis, medical diagnoses, and predictions. But **Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)** would be fundamentally different: systems capable of thinking, learning, and solving problems across many areas, potentially at or beyond human levels.

The **open letter from the Club of Rome** calls for a **special session of the United Nations General Assembly** to address AGI before it outpaces current governance structures (Club of Rome, 2025). This is not about fear or stopping innovation: it is about **responsible preparation**.

Some of the **world's leading AI researchers and developers**, including Geoffrey Hinton, Yoshua Bengio, and Stuart Russell have warned that AGI could introduce risks serious enough to threaten civilization if not managed carefully (Center for AI Safety, 2023; Russell, 2019).

These are **credible voices from the people building these technologies**, not speculative outsiders.

The letter emphasizes several key points:

- **Timing matters:** Technology evolves faster than institutions can often respond. A proactive conversation is necessary to avoid reactive crises.
- **Global coordination is essential:** AGI development will cross borders, industries, and disciplines. Fragmented governance could create instability and increase risk.
- **Progress must be responsible:** Innovation is valuable, but it must be aligned with human values, safety standards, and societal benefit.

Anticipatory governance is the principle behind the call. Rather than waiting for problems to emerge, governments, businesses, and civil society should **plan ahead, coordinate internationally, and establish shared safety frameworks**. The United Nations is uniquely positioned to convene such a conversation at scale (Glenn & Millennium Project, n.d.; United Nations, n.d.).

The message is simple: **AGI has the potential to reshape the future**, offering enormous opportunities in medicine, climate solutions, education, and peace—but it also carries risks that are unprecedented and difficult to reverse. A timely, coordinated, and informed global discussion is not just advisable; it is necessary.

References (APA 7th edition)

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Public-Friendly Summary



Why We Need a Global Conversation on AGI

Artificial intelligence is advancing rapidly. Today's systems are **helpful tools**. AGI tomorrow could **think, learn, and outsmart humans across multiple domains**.

The **Club of Rome** urges a **special UN session** before AGI outpaces governance (Club of Rome, 2025). This is **not fear-mongering**; it's responsible foresight.

Key points:

- **Timing matters:** Tech evolves faster than institutions can respond.
- **Global coordination is essential:** AGI crosses borders and sectors.
- **Progress must be responsible:** Innovation is valuable, but must be **safe, aligned, and socially beneficial**.

Anticipatory governance—planning ahead rather than reacting—is essential. AGI has enormous potential in medicine, climate solutions, and education, but also **unprecedented, irreversible risks**. A timely, coordinated global discussion is critical.

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- Center for AI Safety. (2023). <https://www.safe.ai/statement-on-ai-risk>
- Club of Rome. (2025). <https://www.clubofrome.org/>
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- United Nations. (n.d.). <https://www.un.org/en/artificial-intelligence>

AGI in a Nutshell: The Cliff Notes Version

- AI today: helpful tools. AGI tomorrow: could think, learn, and outsmart us across the board.
- The Club of Rome says: let's talk before it's too late—a UN special session, stat!
- Experts like Hinton, Bengio, and Russell: not doom-sayers, just really, really serious about risk.
- Why now? Tech moves fast, governments move slow—classic mismatch.
- What we need: global teamwork, foresight, and safety-first innovation.
- Bottom line: AGI = huge upside, but also “don't sleep on this” risk.

References (Mini APA style with *only* two links!)

- Club of Rome. (2025). *Open letter on AGI governance*. <https://www.clubofrome.org/>
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Ultra-Short Tweet-Style Version (One sentence you can handle)

AGI: super-smart AI is coming—think faster-than-human brains—and the Club of Rome says, “Hey UN, let's get ahead of this before it bites us in the proverbial!”

The Original Source Document (for reference)

Source one click away:: [Open letter to the President of the UN General Assembly; UN Secretary-General; UN Secretary-General's Technology Envoy; and the Co-Chairs of the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence - Club of Rome](#)

If it's too challenging to click the link the actual document may be perused below.

Open letter to the President of the UN General Assembly; UN Secretary-General; UN Secretary-General's Technology Envoy; and the Co-Chairs of the Independent International Scientific Panel on Artificial Intelligence

We, the undersigned, call for a special session of the UN General Assembly specifically on Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) to engage politicians, businesses, NGOs and AGI experts on how to gain the benefits and avoid the risks of AGI before it is too late.

While current AI systems serve limited purposes like medical diagnosis or report writing, AGI is expected to be able to address novel problems with novel solutions at or beyond human capacity. More advanced forms will rewrite their own computer code, leading to its own objectives beyond human control.

If managed well, AGI could drive unprecedented advances in medicine, education, economics, longevity research, climate solutions, and global peace. However, without proper oversight, it could pose an existential threat to human civilisation.

We congratulate the UN for establishing the Independent International Scientific Panel on AI. Although the Terms of Reference for this Panel do not reflect the urgency of addressing AGI, it should be a top priority for their deliberations. Big Tech companies are expecting to invest \$650 billion into AGI, making it the largest investment in history. Early forms of AGI have already been announced by the journal Nature. More advanced forms of AGI are most likely to be achieved within this decade. We recommend that one of the working groups of the new AI panel focus specifically on the governance of AGI.

Those who know the most warn of existential risk from unregulated AGI:

Statement of risk: Mitigating the risk of extinction from AI should be a global priority... signed by 100 AI scientists and business executives including Sam Altman, Bill Gates, Demis Hassabis, Elon Musk, Stuart Russell and Yoshua Bengio.

Dario Amodei, co-founder and CEO of Anthropic and former VP of research at OpenAI: "My chance that something goes really quite catastrophically wrong on the scale of human civilisation might be somewhere between 10% and 25%."

Geoffrey Hinton, a father of AI and Nobel Prize winner said: “I think it’s important that people understand it’s not just science fiction; it’s not just fear-mongering - it is a real risk that we need to think about, and we need to figure out in advance how to deal with it.”

Recognising this, the Council of Presidents of the UN General Assembly (UNCPGA) established the High-Level Expert Panel on AGI. This AGI Panel was composed of Yoshua Bengio, Stuart Russell and seven other AGI leaders that produced the report [Governance of the Transition to Artificial General Intelligence \(AGI\) Urgent Considerations for the UN General Assembly](#). The report concludes: “increasing the awareness of national and international leaders concerning the benefits and risks of future AGI—as distinct from current forms of AI—is urgently needed.” The UN Scientific Panel on AI will take several months to get organised and a full year to produce initial results. In the meantime, AI would have evolved by several generations. We need urgent action.

We support the UNCPGA AGI report and recommend its immediate distribution to UN Member States and a briefing on its contents initiated by your Excellency’s office leading to a special session of the UN General Assembly specially on AGI.

Signed:

Paul Shrivastava, Co-President, the Club of Rome

Carlos Álvarez Pereira, Secretary General, the Club of Rome

Ugo Bardi, former professor of chemistry at the University of Florence

Christian Berg, Vice President, German Chapter of the Club of Rome

Gianfranco Bologna, WWF Italy - Club of Rome - Italian Alliance

Sustainable Development ASviS

Mariana Bozesan, full member Club of Rome & President AQAL Group

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Jude Currivan, Co-founder, WholeWorld-View

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Sandrine Dixson-Declève, Honorary President of the Club of Rome and Executive Chair, Earth4All

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Joerg Geier, Director, Executive Education, Thunderbird School of Global Management

Jerome Glenn, Chief Executive Officer, the Millenium Project

Andy Haines, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Sirka Heinonen, Professor of the Finland Futures Research Centre at the University of Turku

Friedrich Hinterberger, the Club of Rome and Wachstum im Wandel

Barry Hughes, University of Denver

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Richard van der Jagt, Canadian Association for the Club of Rome **Tapio Kanninen**, President of Global Crisis Information Network Inc.

Radosveta Krastanova, New Bulgarian University, Sofia, Bulgaria - Head of Laboratory for Sustainable Development Solutions

Roman Krznaric, Centre for Eudaimonia and Human Flourishing, University of Oxford

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