

# WITSA NEWSLETTER

Issue 02/26

Fulfilling the Promise of the Digital, Innovation & Tech industry

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**WITSA**

World Innovation, Technology  
and Services Alliance



Issue Highlights

## Navigating the 2026 Goeconomic Pivot & Agentic AI

From the landmark WITSA Strategic Briefing on Agentic AI and high-tech trade fragmentation to WITSA GAIN@Sarawak's, Women in Tech spotlights, the WTO advocacy and announcement of the next WITSA Global AI Summit and Global AI Awards 2026, WITSA's March–April 2026 edition maps the forces reshaping the global technology landscape.

- **Goeconomic Pivot Scenario Planning**
- **WITSA GAIN@Sarawak**
- **Women in Tech: IWD 2026**
- **WITSA Global AI Summit 2026**
- **WITSA Global AI Awards 2026**
- **WTO Moratorium Crisis**
- **WITSA Webinar Series Recap**

# CEO'S CORNER



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## ***CEO's Corner:***

### **At the Goeconomic Pivot: Courage, Connectivity, and the Stakes of Our Moment**

As we move through the first quarter of 2026, it is increasingly clear that we are no longer debating the future of AI — we are living it. The era of experimentation and hype has ended. What we face now is a high-stakes reality in which autonomous, Agentic AI systems are being deployed at the enterprise level, acting as strategic economic actors capable of executing complex tasks across weeks and months. This is the goeconomic pivot our industry has been anticipating, and the choices we make in the coming months will shape the trajectory of the global digital economy for the next decade.



On April 7, WITSA convened a landmark Strategic Briefing: The 2026 Goeconomic Pivot: Navigating the Fragmentation of High-Tech Trade and Agentic AI, bringing together Robert Janssen, our Deputy Chairman and AI Task Force Chairman, Ed Brzytwa, our Policy Chairman and CTA's Vice President of International Trade and yours truly. The session was sobering and clarifying in equal measure.

When we designed the scenario framework that underpins that briefing, the first and most consequential decision was which two variables would define the axes of uncertainty. We considered many candidates: the pace of AI capability development, the energy economics of compute, the geopolitics of the Taiwan Strait, the maturity of workforce reskilling programmes. Each carries real consequence. But in every serious scenario exercise, the discipline is not to map every variable — it is to identify the two that are both genuinely uncertain and genuinely determinative. If one force is almost certainly going to move in one direction, it should inform your scenarios, not define them. If a variable matters enormously but is shaped entirely by other forces on your map, it is an outcome, not an axis.

That thinking led us to the horizontal axis: Geopolitical Openness versus Fragmentation. The global technology order is genuinely bifurcating. US export controls on advanced semiconductors have tightened in each of the past two years. China has enacted its own AI regulations independently of any Western framework.



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The European Union's AI Act has established a third regulatory architecture. India is constructing sovereign compute infrastructure and data governance regimes that answer to no external standard. And most recently, the WTO E-Commerce Moratorium — the foundational legal shield protecting cross-border digital trade since 1998 — was allowed to lapse at MC14 in Yaoundé, for the first time in 26 years. That lapse was not accidental.

It was the product of a principled stand by Brazil and others that national regulatory sovereignty should take precedence over multilateral certainty. You may agree or disagree with that position, but the trajectory it represents is unmistakable: the world is organizing around sovereign and bloc-based technology regimes, not converging toward global standards. And yet — critically — this is not inevitable. Enough multilateral architecture remains, and enough economic incentive for interconnection exists, that the outcome is genuinely uncertain. That is precisely why it belongs on the horizontal axis.

For the vertical axis, we chose AI Governance Quality — from strong, outcome-based frameworks at the top, to governance breakdown at the bottom. This is the dimension that most technology leaders underestimate, because governance feels like a policy conversation rather than a business reality. I would argue the opposite. The quality of AI governance determines whether agentic systems can be deployed across borders with legal certainty, whether enterprises can build on top of AI infrastructure without catastrophic liability exposure, and whether smaller economies can participate meaningfully in the AI economy or are effectively excluded by compliance costs they cannot absorb. Heavy, prescriptive regulation — the kind that assigns liability before deployment and mandates technical specifications rather than outcomes — is not neutral.

Our modelling shows it creates a scenario worth negative \$1.9 trillion to global GDP: not because regulation is inherently bad, but because the wrong kind of regulation freezes the deployment of transformative technology while providing minimal safety benefit. Governance breakdown, on the other hand, creates the conditions for AI to be weaponised in state-level cyber conflict, for semiconductor supply chains to be treated as instruments of coercion, and for the entire technology stack to become a theatre of geopolitical competition. That scenario carries a \$10 trillion downside. The vertical axis is uncertain because we genuinely do not yet know whether the world's major regulatory blocs will converge on light-touch, outcome-based frameworks, or whether the precautionary instinct — amplified by legitimate safety concerns around frontier AI — will produce a global regulatory architecture that stifles rather than steers.

Scenario at a Glance

**23%**

Current probability of the preferred "Agentic Renaissance" scenario, WITSA's AI modelling tool

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The Sovereign Superpowers scenario is, frankly, the world we are already building. US, EU, China, and India are each investing in sovereign AI compute, sovereign data governance, and sovereign regulatory architecture. The ECA (Electronic Commerce Agreement) adopted by 66 WTO members at MC14 — while a genuine achievement — is itself a plurilateral structure: a group of like-minded countries creating a shared digital trade regime outside the universal WTO framework. That is the architecture of a world organized into blocs, not a world organized around global standards. Our current modelling puts the probability of arriving at this scenario at approximately 38% — making it the most likely single outcome, even if not the most desirable one. The key strategic question is whether bloc formation produces governance quality at the bloc level that eventually converges, or whether the blocs become so institutionally entrenched and technically incompatible that reintegration becomes effectively impossible. That question will be answered in the next three to five years.



The lower quadrants represent the scenarios we are most urgently working to prevent. The Regulated Slow-Path — an open world hobbled by prescriptive compliance — is the outcome that results from good intentions without good design. SME compliance costs running into hundreds of thousands of euros per AI system, mandatory impact assessments that add 12 to 24 months to deployment timelines, and liability frameworks calibrated to worst-case assumptions rather than observed risk: these are not theoretical concerns. They are already visible in the early implementation experience of the EU AI Act. WITSA's advocacy for regulatory sandboxes and outcome-based frameworks is not an argument against safety — it is an argument for safety mechanisms proportionate to the actual risk profile of the systems being deployed. And the Fractured and Failing Systems scenario should concentrate every mind in our network. The Taiwan Strait remains the single highest-consequence geopolitical flashpoint, not because conflict is likely, but because Taiwan produces over 90% of the world's most advanced semiconductors. A semiconductor supply chain disruption of that scale is not a technology sector story. It is a civilizational one. AI-enabled offensive cyber operations are already being conducted at state level. The distance between the world we inhabit today and a \$10 trillion contraction scenario is shorter than most people are comfortable acknowledging.



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Our scenario planning framework maps these four possible futures. The one we are working to achieve – the Agentic Renaissance – is characterised by open, shared frameworks that enable trustworthy AI deployment across borders, unlocking an estimated \$7 trillion incremental uplift to global GDP over the next decade. At present, our modelling places the probability of reaching that scenario at 23%. That figure should concentrate every mind in our network. The distance between a \$7 trillion uplift and a \$10 trillion contraction is the distance between global cooperation and engineered fragmentation — and it is a distance that choices made in the coming 18 months will begin to lock in.

The greatest risk I would highlight to any technology leader today is underestimating velocity. Competitors and rival nations are moving faster than most organisations acknowledge. The single most consequential move is to accelerate deployment timelines, not to wait for perfect regulatory certainty that may never arrive.

The formalisation of WITSA GAIN@Sarawak on April 2 stands as a concrete expression of the approach we must take globally: building strategic connectivity rather than pursuing naive sovereignty. Sarawak's emergence as our first ASEAN Hub Partner proves that smaller and mid-sized economies can claim an indispensable niche within the global AI network without attempting to replicate the hyperscale stacks of the US or China. This is what a well-navigated path toward the Agentic Renaissance looks like in practice: a sovereign economy making deliberate, strategic choices about where it connects, rather than attempting to build everything and connect to nothing.

Simultaneously, we face a genuine crisis in global digital trade following the unprecedented lapse of the WTO E-Commerce Moratorium at MC14 in Yaoundé. For the first time since 1998, the foundational shield protecting cross-border digital trade has been removed. WITSA's response has been unequivocal, and I call on every member to engage their governments on this urgently. The costs of digital tariffs, to GDP, to SME competitiveness, to the digital divide, are dozens of times greater than any revenue gain they might generate.

We also took a meaningful stand for inclusion this March, amplifying the voices of women technology leaders in recognition of International Women's Day under the theme "Give to Gain." The principle is clear: when we invest in women with opportunity, mentorship, and genuine leadership roles whole industries and economies gain. This is not a peripheral concern for WITSA; it sits at the heart of our vision for AI that is inclusive, equitable, and trustworthy.



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Before I close, I wish to record a very personal note of appreciation. This period has also brought transitions within our leadership family. We bid a heartfelt farewell to Frits Bussemaker, who has stepped down from WITSA's Board of Directors, and to Antonio Cimorra of AMETIC Spain, who retires from his role as our Vice Chairman for Europe (EU/EEA) after many years of distinguished service. Both Frits and Antonio have been exceptional advocates for our mission, Frits bringing his passion for accountability in the digital age, community building, and his founding contribution to ITU's AI for Good Global Summit; Antonio bringing over 35 years of deep expertise in telecommunications and digital policy, and steering WITSA's European voice with skill and integrity since his election in 2022. WITSA is a stronger, more credible, and more globally connected organisation because of their contributions, and we wish them well in every chapter ahead. We are equally delighted to welcome Petra Claessen, President of BTG Netherlands and Vice President of EUWENA, a Knight in the Order of Nassau, and a powerful advocate for responsible digital transformation to the WITSA Board of Directors. We look forward to her energy and vision strengthening our network.

I am also thrilled to announce an upcoming landmark moment for our community: the Taiwan Innovative Software and Services Association (TISSA) will host the 2nd WITSA Global AI Summit 2026, together with the inaugural WITSA Global AI Awards, this August/September in Taipei. This new global recognition of companies, governments and academia for their significant contribution towards AI innovation, governance, and impact across our member economies is aligned to the 7-pillar framework of WITSA's Global AI Ecosystem Network. Taiwan's standing as one of the world's most advanced semiconductor and AI ecosystems makes Taipei the ideal stage for this gathering. I encourage all WITSA members to begin planning their participation now, and to put forward nominations for the WITSA Global AI Awards. The challenges before us are immense. But meeting this moment requires political and corporate courage. WITSA's role is to build the trust frameworks and advocate for the harmonised standards that make the Agentic Renaissance not merely possible, but inevitable.

***Dato' Dan E Khoo***  
***WITSA Chief Executive Officer***



# FEATURE

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## Strategic Briefing: The 2026 Geoeconomic Pivot

### *Navigating the Fragmentation of High-Tech Trade and Agentic AI*

On April 7, 2026, WITSA convened a landmark strategic briefing to map the forces reshaping the global digital economy and the industry's strategic response.

#### Robert Janssen

WITSA Deputy Chairman  
WITSA AI Task Force Chairman

#### Ed Brzytwa

WITSA Board of Director  
WITSA Policy Chairman

#### Dato' Dan E. Khoo

WITSA Chief Executive Officer

#### Executive Summary

This briefing specifically addresses:

- **The Post-MC14 Reality:** The implications of the lapsed WTO e-commerce moratorium and the shift from "Just-in-Time" efficiency to "Just-in-Case" survivalism in global supply chains.
- **Regional Frameworks as Pathways:** How agreements like the AfCFTA and CPTPP are providing vital frameworks for cross-border data flow certainty and proactive digital leadership.
- **The Mandate for Courageous Leadership:** A clear call to action for our global industry to actively partner with governments, resist digital protectionism, and build the frictionless digital infrastructure required to scale AI equitably.

#### WITSA 2026 Scenario Framework

##### TARGET STATE

Agentic Renaissance  
+\$7T GDP · Open & integrated

##### RISK ZONE

Sovereign Superpowers  
Closed blocs  
Fragmented standards

##### STAGNATION

Regulated Slow Path  
Over-regulation · SME barriers

##### CRISIS ZONE

Fractured & Failing  
-\$10T GDP · Supply chain collapse

Current probability of preferred scenario  
**23%**  
Sensitive to WTO restoration & regulatory alignment

[Get the scenario planning brief here](#)

# WITSA STRATEGIC BRIEFING: NAVIGATING THE 2026 GEOECONOMIC PIVOT & AGENTIC AI

Part 1: The 2026 Scenario Planning Framework

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## ***Insights from Dato' Dan E. Khoo, WITSA CEO***

The macro-economic context of 2026 is defined by a "Multiplex World Order"; a system driven by regional opportunism rather than a single rules-based ideology. While global growth faces significant headwinds, digitally deliverable services have emerged as the fastest-growing sector in global trade.

However, this growth is threatened by rising export controls, the treatment of data centers and GPUs as strategic national assets, and the push for sovereign AI ecosystems that reduce foreign dependency.

To navigate this volatility, WITSA has developed a Scenario Planning Framework based on two axes of uncertainty: AI Integration Depth and Global Market Alignment. This framework maps four potential trajectories for the global digital economy:

- **The Agentic Renaissance (The Target State):** This highly integrated and open scenario is driven by shared frameworks that enable trustworthy AI deployment across borders. Agentic AI optimizes global logistics, and harmonized standards expand digital trade flows, unlocking an estimated \$7 trillion incremental uplift to global GDP over the next decade.
- **Sovereign Superpowers (The Tech Fortress):** While AI integration remains deep, the market fractures into closed blocs dominated by the US, China, and the EU. Data localization mandates and fragmented standards raise costs, ultimately slowing innovation under regional isolation.
- **The Regulated Slow Path (Stagnation Risk):** Characterized by risk-averse cultures and prescriptive, heavy-handed regulations. Severe liability frameworks and compliance burdens create insurmountable barriers, particularly for SMEs, leaving AI's transformative economic gains largely unrealized.



# WITSA STRATEGIC BRIEFING: NAVIGATING THE 2026 GEOECONOMIC PIVOT & AGENTIC AI

Part 1: The 2026 Scenario Planning Framework

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- **Fractured and Failing Systems (The Crisis Zone):** The worst-case scenario, representing a potential \$10 trillion hit to global GDP. Severe geopolitical breakdowns disrupt tech trade, semiconductor fragility triggers a "heart attack" in global supply chains, and AI is increasingly weaponized in cyber and physical conflicts

**Strategic Imperatives:** To steer toward the Agentic Renaissance, WITSA advocates for light-touch, outcome-based regulation, the establishment of regulatory sandboxes, and a firm resistance to digital protectionism. Industry must prioritize human-centric, "Explainable AI" to build trust and push for renewable energy to support the vast infrastructure required.

WITSA's strategic modelling is stark in its framing: navigating this pivot successfully could unlock a \$7 trillion uplift to global GDP. Failure to establish global AI interoperability risks a \$10 trillion economic contraction.



*"The greatest risk is underestimating velocity. Companies must not underestimate how quickly their competitors are moving to adopt autonomous technologies. The move tomorrow is to accelerate deployment timelines."*

— Dato' Dan E. Khoo

# WITSA STRATEGIC BRIEFING: NAVIGATING THE 2026 GEOECONOMIC PIVOT & AGENTIC AI

Part 2: AI as the New Infrastructure of Global Trade

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## ***Insights from Robert Janssen, WITSA Deputy Chairman & President of ASSESPRO Brazil***

The global perspective reveals that market sentiment regarding AI is actually "under-hyped" when compared to the structural realities. Artificial Intelligence is no longer a localized technology; it has become the fundamental infrastructure of trade itself.

The global economy is transitioning from the trade of physical goods to the cross-border movement of intelligence, facilitated by autonomous Agentic AI.



Competitiveness in this new era is dictated by a four-layered "Trade Stack": Computational Power, Data, Models, and Distribution Platforms. While controlling two or more of these layers provides a massive competitive advantage, the attempt by individual nations to monopolize all four creates a dangerous dynamic.

**The Sovereignty Trap vs. Strategic Connectivity** A central tension defining 2026 is the clash between digital sovereignty and global interoperability. Driven by national security concerns, many nations are falling into the "Sovereignty Trap"; an "I'll build it locally" mindset that results in the costly duplication of infrastructure and disconnection from global intelligence flows.

For nations outside of the primary tech superpowers (the US and China), attempting to replicate entire sovereign AI stacks is a strategic error that wastes capital and time. True economic resilience relies on Strategic Connectivity. Countries must find an indispensable niche within global AI networks. For example, Brazil is positioning itself as an intelligent hub by leveraging its unparalleled diversity; a critical, unique asset for ensuring cultural interoperability and mitigating bias in global AI models. The ultimate winners in this geoeconomic pivot will not be the most isolated and "sovereign" nations, but those best positioned to connect, orchestrate, and scale globally.

*"We are currently engineering fragmentation. Interoperability will not happen organically; it must be designed intentionally. A fragmented AI world would be the single most expensive policy mistake governments could make."*

— Robert Janssen

# WITSA STRATEGIC BRIEFING: NAVIGATING THE 2026 GEOECONOMIC PIVOT & AGENTIC AI

Part 3: The Fracturing of Global Digital Trade Rules Post-MC14

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## ***Insights from Ed Brzytwa, WITSA Board of Director, WITSA Public Policy Chairman & VP of International Trade, CTA***

The promise of Agentic AI is fundamentally dependent on robust, seamless digital trade rules and the free flow of data. Unfortunately, we are witnessing the real-time fragmentation of the global trading system.

**The Collapse of the WTO E-commerce Moratorium** For the first time since 1998, the WTO moratorium on customs duties for electronic transmissions was allowed to expire at MC14 in Yaoundé, Cameroon — blocked primarily by Brazil and Turkey. This marks the

first trade-negative outcome in WTO history. While 22 WTO members (including the US) have pledged to temporarily uphold the moratorium, this provides limited long-term certainty for the global tech industry.

**The Shift to Plurilateral Agreements** Because consensus at the WTO is increasingly paralyzed often by nations leveraging veto power for unrelated political concessions digital trade rules are being forced into plurilateral and bilateral channels. For example, a promising 66-country e-commerce agreement is advancing outside the WTO framework, though it notably excludes major players like the US and China. Comprehensive agreements like the CPTPP and USMCA remain regional rather than truly global.

**Agentic AI is Digital Trade Data** is not a finite resource like oil; it is an infinitely scalable asset that fuels Agentic AI. If nations insist on domesticating data sets for AI training and inference, they are fundamentally stifling their own innovation and participation in the global digital economy. To scale Agentic AI successfully, the industry must forcefully advocate for multilateral cooperation and interoperable frameworks (such as cross-border privacy rules) to reverse the trend of digital protectionism.



*"The greatest risk is a defensive posture. CEOs must prioritise bravery over resilience. The single best move is to remain nimble and aggressively adopt new tools rather than waiting for perfect conditions."*  
— Ed Brzytwa

# IN APPRECIATION:

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## **Frits Bussemaker**

WITSA records its deepest appreciation to Frits Bussemaker for his dedicated service as a member of WITSA's Global Board of Directors, representing Netherlands. Frits brought to the WITSA table a rare combination of qualities: a genuine passion for the intersection of technology, accountability, and human impact; a gift for building communities across borders; and an unwavering commitment to ensuring that digital transformation serves society as a whole rather than the privileged few.

Within WITSA, Frits was elected to the Board at WCIT 2024 in Armenia, where he delivered a keynote on Accountability in the Digital Age. His presence was always thoughtful, measured, and constructive a steadying voice that reminded us why the work we do matters beyond commerce and policy, and reaches into the everyday lives of people around the world.



## **Antonio Cimorra**

WITSA extends warmest appreciation to Antonio Cimorra, who has been one of the most consistent and authoritative voices for European technology policy within WITSA's global leadership structure, serving as Vice Chairman for Europe (EU/EEA) since his election at the WITSA General Assembly in 2022.

Antonio has served WITSA with great distinction, representing European perspectives with clarity and influence in the organization's advocacy for digital trade, AI policy, and inclusive digital governance. He also served on the Board of Directors of ALETI, the Federation of Latin American ICT Associations, deepening WITSA's transatlantic connections. His retirement marks the end of an era of dedicated international service.

*"The strength of WITSA lies not only in the initiatives we launch, but in the people who dedicate themselves to building them, often quietly, always generously."*

— Dato' Dan E Khoo, CEO, WITSA

# NEW BOARD APPOINTMENT:

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## ***Petra Claessen***

WITSA is delighted to welcome Petra Claessen to its Global Board of Directors, appointed by the Board to succeed Frits Bussemaker as the representative of BTG Netherlands. Petra brings an exceptional depth of leadership as she currently sits at the intersection of European and global technology policy.

In her role as President, Petra leads initiatives on digital transformation, sustainable innovation, AI, future networks like 5G and 6G, and smart society, concepts such as smart cities. She serves as a liaison between BTG Members and Partners and the government, advocating for their needs. Beyond her work at BTG, Petra holds several national and international advisory and leadership positions.

Together with Frits Bussemaker, Petra Claessen is Co-Chair of iPoort. She is also Vice President of EUWENA (European Users Wireless Enterprise Network Association) and Chair of INTUG (International Telecom User Group). She actively contributes to public-private collaborations including the Dutch National Coalition for Sustainable Digitalization and the Tech Think Tank.

Her ability to build bridges between government, academia, and the private sector has made her a sought-after board member, speaker, and advisor on digital policy and innovation. In recognition of her longstanding contributions to the (high) tech industry and civil society, both nationally and internationally, she was awarded the title of Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau in 2024.

Petra studied Human Resources and Dutch law and has completed various marketing programmes throughout her career, equipping her with a multidisciplinary perspective that strengthens her leadership in the technology sector.



# SPECIAL FEATURE:

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY "GIVE TO GAIN": WOMEN POWERING THE GLOBAL TECH ECOSYSTEM

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This year's International Women's Day theme "Give to Gain" resonates deeply with the spirit that drives women leaders across WITSA's global network. The premise is both simple and profound: when we invest in women, when we give opportunities, mentorship, resources, and a seat at the decision-making table, everyone gains. The returns in innovation, in economic growth, in more equitable AI are multiplied many times over.

In recognition of IWD 2026, WITSA spotlighted the extraordinary contributions of women shaping the global technology industry across our member network. From AI policy architects to digital economy entrepreneurs, from cybersecurity pioneers to ecosystem builders, these leaders embody what "Give to Gain" means in practice: they give their expertise, their advocacy, and their leadership and in doing so, they lift entire industries and communities with them.

This theme carries a particular urgency in the AI era. The development of Agentic AI systems that are fair, trustworthy, and globally beneficial requires diverse voices at every stage, from training data curation to governance frameworks to deployment decisions. When women are excluded from these processes, the systems that result carry forward the blind spots of the past. When they are included and empowered, AI becomes a genuine force for shared prosperity.

WITSA members are encouraged to continue nominating outstanding women leaders within their national tech ecosystems for recognition and speaking opportunities through the WITSA Speakers Bureau, one of the most tangible ways our network can embody the spirit of "Give to Gain."

Watch our Women in Tech featured on the [WITSA YouTube Channel](#)

### **Give Mentorship, Gain Innovation**

When experienced women tech leaders invest their time in the next generation, organisations gain deeper talent pipelines, more creative problem-solving, and stronger retention across the board.

### **Give Inclusion, Gain Better AI**

AI systems built with diverse, inclusive teams produce fairer outcomes and reach broader markets. Investing in women in AI is not charity — it is a strategic imperative for trustworthy technology.

### **Give Opportunity, Gain Growth**

Economies that actively close the gender gap in technology see measurable GDP gains. WITSA's global network is uniquely positioned to champion this exchange across 80+ member economies.

# GLOBAL NEWS: SDEC SIGNS AS WITSA GAIN FOUNDING HUB PARTNER

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The World Innovation, Technology and Services Alliance (WITSA) and Sarawak Digital Economy Corporation (SDEC) formalised a strategic partnership on April 2, 2026, establishing the WITSA Global AI Ecosystem Network in Sarawak (WITSA GAIN@Sarawak).

The agreement positions Sarawak as the first AI Ecosystem Founding Hub Partner in ASEAN, a global platform designed to accelerate a country's AI ecosystem development, foster regional and international collaboration, and promote inclusive innovation-driven economic growth.



*"Sarawak's strong commitment to digital transformation and inclusive innovation makes it an ideal regional anchor for advancing AI ecosystem development across Southeast Asia and beyond."*

**Dato' Dr Sean Seah,  
WITSA Chairman**



## WITSA GAIN 7-Pillar Framework



AI  
Infrastructure



AI Use Cases



AI Talent



Entrepreneurship



Data



Public Policy



Investments

# GLOBAL NEWS: SDEC SIGNS AS WITSA GAIN FOUNDING HUB PARTNER

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SDEC Chairman Tan Sri Datuk Amar Haji Mohamad Morshidi Abdul Ghani reinforced that the partnership extends well beyond technology alone: the collaboration is intended to build a sustainable ecosystem that fosters local talent, attracts global investment, and ensures AI serves as a catalyst for socio-economic growth in line with Sarawak's Post-COVID-19 Development Strategy 2030 (PCDS 2030).

WITSA CEO Dato' Dan E Khoo noted that WITSA GAIN@Sarawak will play a strategic role in enabling cross-border collaboration, talent development, and responsible AI adoption within the global WITSA GAIN network, which already includes hub partners in Brazil, Taiwan, the Middle East, and Europe.

SDEC CEO Dato Ir. Ts. Sudarnoto Osman outlined the immediate priorities: a rigorous assessment of current AI capabilities and infrastructure, followed by targeted support for entrepreneurs and government agencies benchmarked against the highest global standards.



# POLICY ADVOCACY:

## WITSA RESPONDS TO WTO E-COMMERCE CRISIS

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### WITSA Decries Expiration of WTO E-Commerce Moratorium as a Crisis for Global Digital Trade

The moratorium that has prohibited customs duties on electronic transmissions since 1998 has expired, threatening the open digital economy. Read the full press release [here](#).

### A 28-Year Foundation Under Threat

Since 1998, the WTO E-Commerce Moratorium had prohibited customs duties on electronic transmissions, forming the bedrock of the global digital economy and enabling the internet to become the backbone of supply chains worldwide. Its expiration at the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14) marks a severe blow to multilateral digital trade cooperation.

WITSA has been unequivocal: the economic costs of digital tariffs — in terms of lost GDP, diminished SME competitiveness, and widened digital divides — far outweigh any potential customs revenue gains. OECD research presented at WITSA's February webinar showed that potential revenue losses for low-income countries would average a mere 0.33%, while VAT/GST collections in 77 of 106 countries already fully offset any revenue previously lost from declining physical media.

The stakes for the digital economy are particularly acute for developing nations and smaller economies. A simple 10% digital tariff could turn profitable small businesses into unprofitable ones overnight, while raising the cost of AI tools like large language models for countries that rely on cross-border access.

### What Comes Next

WITSA is actively engaging its global membership to respond. Key priorities include advocating for the earliest possible restoration of a moratorium framework, supporting plurilateral trade agreements among the 154 nations that supported the moratorium, and mobilising WITSA's voice in international policy forums.

### WITSA's Mission at MC14 Follow-Up:

Protect the duty-free environment that powers modern innovation and ensures AI access remains equitable for all economies.

WITSA Chairman Dato' Dr Sean Seah called on all member associations to engage their respective governments on the critical importance of maintaining duty-free digital trade, not only for their national tech sectors, but for the global digital commons.

Members are encouraged to review the WITSA position paper and use the organisation's advocacy materials to brief policymakers in their home economies.

# KNOWLEDGE & INSIGHTS:

## WITSA WEBINAR SERIES

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WITSA hosted two high-impact webinars in March 2026, continuing its commitment to equipping members with the knowledge needed to navigate a rapidly evolving global landscape.

**March 19, 2026**

### **Balancing Innovation and Sovereignty: Decoding AI Regulation in East Asia**

The Global Digital Triumvirate

Before diving into regional specifics, Mr. Mok established the three primary models of digital governance that currently influence global AI policy:

- **The United States:** Characterized by a market-driven, "Silicon Valley" mentality that often views regulation and innovation as antithetical. While the federal level remains somewhat dysfunctional, there is a pivot toward an "America First" AI Action Plan focusing on global dominance of the U.S. tech stack.
- **The European Union:** A rights-based model prioritizing privacy, democratic accountability, and human rights. This model exerts influence via the "Brussels Effect," where global platforms adopt EU standards to maintain access to its large market.
- **China:** A state-led, party-driven model focused on national and economic security. China is increasingly exporting this model to the Global South through the "Digital Silk Road"



### **Country Regulatory Summaries**

#### **South Korea: Aggressive Enforcement and Protectionist Traits**

South Korea is identified as an outlier in the region due to its aggressive pursuit of AI regulation and enforcement. On January 22, 2026, the country passed the Basic Act on the Development of Artificial Intelligence, which establishes a "foundation for trustworthiness". The law defines "high-impact AI" applications—including nuclear safety, water supply, healthcare, and financial credit evaluation—which strictly require human oversight.

Furthermore, companies must provide advanced notice to users when utilizing high-impact AI and implement a "user protection plan". This regulatory stance is rooted in a tradition of digital protectionism aimed at safeguarding domestic platforms like Naver and Daum Kakao against global competitors. Despite this heavy-handed approach, the administration has also proposed initiatives to foster innovation, including the goal of creating "50 future unicorns".

#### **Japan: Light-Touch and Innovation-Friendly**

In contrast to Korea, Japan maintains a "light-touch" and soft-law approach that emphasizes innovation. National sentiment in Japan remains largely optimistic about the social impact of AI, showing less concern for ethics and governance than Western populations. The proposed Japanese AI Act focuses on minimum legal requirements only for AI models that pose "extremely high risks," while otherwise relying on cooperative guidelines.

While Japan has taken recent antitrust actions against Google to protect the domestic search industry, these are viewed more as competition protection than strict AI regulation. Internationally, Japan continues to align with the U.S. on supply-chain security and maintains a leadership role in developing OECD AI principles and the G7 Hiroshima AI Process.

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March 19, 2026

### Balancing Innovation and Sovereignty: Decoding AI Regulation in East Asia Country Regulatory Summaries - continued

#### Taiwan: The "AI Island" Ambition

Taiwan's regulatory strategy is defined by its AI Basic Act, passed in December 2025, which is more directional than prescriptive. The Act designates the National Science and Technology Commission (NSTC) as the central authority and tasks the Ministry of Digital Affairs (MODA) with developing a risk classification framework. Taiwan is aggressively pursuing "AI sovereignty" through its TAIDE project—a domestically developed Large Language Model (LLM) designed to reflect local culture and language.

To support its "AI Island" ambitions, the government is investing US\$3.2 billion into ten major AI projects, targeting high-growth areas like silicon photonics, quantum computing, and AI robotics. This approach aims to replicate Taiwan's historical success in semiconductor manufacturing within the AI era.

#### India: Consciously "Lightweight" and Pro-Innovation

India has explicitly chosen not to lead with aggressive regulation, with its IT Secretary describing the country's 2025 AI Governance Guidelines as a "lightweight" approach. Rather than rushing into new legislation, India intends to leverage existing frameworks, such as the Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023. The government is focused on establishing AI Centres of Excellence to develop Indian LLMs using indigenous datasets through the AIKosh initiative. While private members' bills regarding AI ethics have been introduced in Parliament, the government's primary focus remains on fostering adoption and hosting global industry summits to secure its place in the global AI supply chain.



#### Singapore: Sector-Specific Hub and Testing Ground

Singapore continues to prioritize industry development and rapid response, positioning itself as a global testing ground for AI. Under its National AI Strategy 2.0 (NAIS 2.0), the country has allocated SGD 1 billion for AI capability development and workforce readiness. Singapore avoids comprehensive, cross-sector AI laws in favor of a sector-specific approach. For example, the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) manages financial sector AI guidelines, while the Workplace Fairness Act (effective 2027) will address AI driven HR systems. The government also plans to establish an Online Safety Commission in 2026 to regulate AI-generated content on social media.

#### Vietnam: EU-Style Risk-Based Regulation

Vietnam became the first in Southeast Asia to pass a comprehensive, risk-based AI law, which took effect on March 1, 2026. Modeled after the EU system, the law utilizes a three tier risk classification. High-risk systems are subject to strict life-cycle risk management and safety assurance. Notably, the law includes a "hostage clause" requiring foreign providers of high-risk systems to undergo pre-market conformity assessments and appoint a local representative.

While the law was passed quickly, many details regarding the penalty framework and specific definitions remain unclear, leading to some industry concern regarding its impact on startups.

#### Final Food for Thought

While most Asian nations prefer "light-handed" approaches, the trend toward AI Sovereignty is growing. Countries are increasingly moving from "one world, one internet" to "one country, its own AI models" to protect local language and culture.

However, this fragmentation poses risks to global interoperability and could increase geopolitical tension

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### US-China Technology Competition and China's 15th Five Year Plan (2026–2030)

The WITSA webinar held on March 4, 2026, provided a comprehensive analysis of the escalating technological rivalry between the United States and China, specifically focusing on the implications of China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030).

Ambassador Craig Allen, a veteran diplomat and expert in U.S.-China commercial relations, highlighted that the global technology industry is currently witnessing the rapid development of a robust and sustainable innovation ecosystem in China.

This system is characterized by significant speed, scale, and dynamism, driven by a massive pool of young engineering talent and an institutional environment optimized for innovation. The Ambassador noted that while China was historically known for process innovation, it has successfully shifted toward technology-driven disruption in sectors like electronics, materials, and life sciences. China's Innovation Flywheel and Manufacturing Strategy A central theme of the presentation was the "flywheel of perpetual innovation" within China's private sector.

Ambassador Allen explained that intense, "gladiatorial" domestic competition forces Chinese companies to innovate constantly to gain even brief first mover advantages, often knowing competitors will catch up within a week. This relentless pace is supported by a surplus of STEM workers and a regulatory environment that facilitates rapid clinical trials and technology diffusion.

Under the 15th Five-Year Plan, China intends to double down on this momentum by prioritizing six key areas: semiconductor manufacturing equipment, computer numerical control systems, high-end scientific instruments, traditional software, advanced materials, and life sciences. Furthermore, China plans to integrate AI across all manufacturing sectors, including labor intensive industries like textiles and consumer electronics, to maintain its competitive edge against countries with lower labor costs.

The Ambassador also addressed the massive scale of Chinese government support, noting that the country spends approximately 4% of its GDP on industrial and innovation subsidies—ten times the rate of its closest peer, South Korea. While the IMF considers this spending inefficient, leading to a 2% drag on GDP, the Chinese government views it as an effective tool for achieving national prestige and technological sovereignty.

This strategy has allowed China to lead in "conforming innovation" in sectors like pharma and e commerce, while simultaneously disrupting global markets in electric vehicles, solar power, and telecom equipment. However, China still faces significant bottlenecks, including a lack of rule of law, arbitrary regulatory enforcement, and a demographic crisis that may eventually limit its labor force quality compared to other Asian economies.



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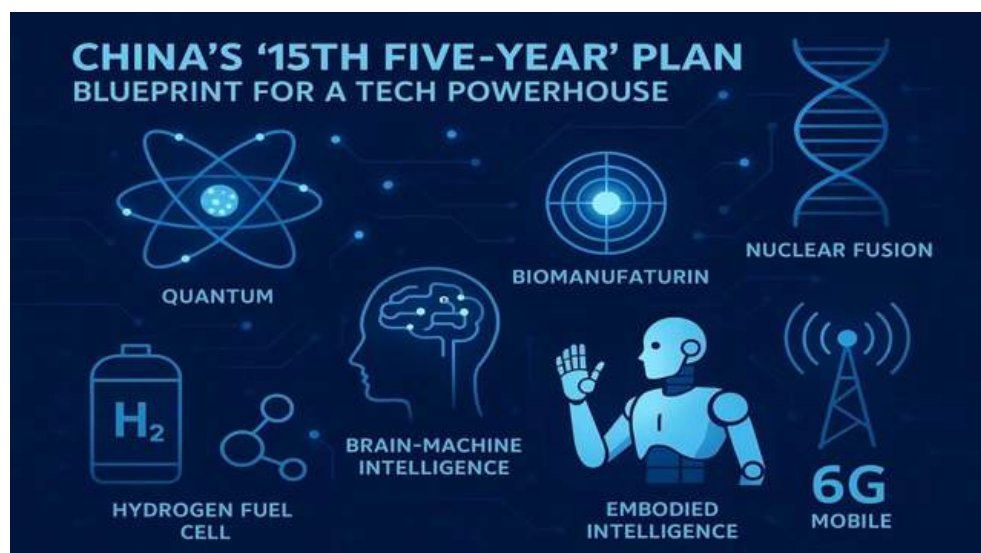
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The Bifurcated Tech Stack and Export Controls The discussion underscored a move away from the traditional "Silicon Valley-Shenzhen" model toward a fragmented or "bifurcated" global tech stack. Both the U.S. and China are implementing "tech stack purges," with the U.S. utilizing the ICTS rule<sup>1</sup> and China enforcing "safe and secure tech" regulations that make it increasingly difficult for foreign companies to sell to state entities. Export controls have evolved from tools to prevent the spread of weapons into protectionist measures used to impede competition.

Ambassador Allen noted that while a diplomatic "ceasefire" occurred before the 2025 Trump-Xi summit, both nations remain capable of implementing aggressive counteracting strategies, particularly regarding critical minerals and cross-border data flows. During the webinar, the discussion regarding the upcoming April 2026 summit between President Trump and President Xi centered on whether the meeting would result in a "transactional truce" or solidify a permanent "dual-stack" future for the global technology industry.

Ambassador Allen noted the inherent tension within the U.S. administration, contrasting President Trump's known enthusiasm for high-stakes deal-making with the more rigid, security-focused views held by "China hawks" in his cabinet. While there was a diplomatic ceasefire on export controls leading up to the summit, the long-term predictability of the tech supply chain remains highly uncertain. The tech industry is watching the summit closely to see if it will restore some level of supply chain predictability or if sovereign AI mandates and high tariffs will become the new permanent baseline for 2026.

Ambassador Allen suggested that while up to four presidential meetings could occur throughout 2026, both nations have already developed the capability to implement counteracting strategies and "tech stack purges," making a return to a fully integrated global network unlikely. Consequently, the summit is viewed less as a potential return to the status quo and more as a high-level attempt to find a mutually beneficial equilibrium amidst a period of intense systemic rivalry.



*Credit photo to Leo G, Game Changer In Battery, LinkedIn.*

# LAUNCH OF THE WITSA CYBERSECURITY TASK FORCE:

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On March 10, 2026, WITSA officially inaugurated its Cybersecurity Task Force, a landmark initiative designed to foster international cooperation and bridge the gap between global businesses and government entities. This task force is a strategic necessity for WITSA and its member associations as escalating cyber threats now pose a direct risk to the global digital economy and the reputations of member companies.



Because failure to mitigate these risks diminishes a company's value proposition, the Task Force will focus on protecting business value through technical alignment and cooperation rather than pushing for rigid, uniform legislation, which is often impractical due to differing regional regulatory environments.

The session included a distinguished panel who provided deep dives into regional developments and global trends:

- Robert Janssen (WITSA Deputy Chairman/President of ASSESPRO Brazil) – Latin America
- Florin Vrejoiu (WITSA Board of Director/Managing Director, ATIC Romania) – Europe
- Laura Koetzle (Head of Community Research, RSAC) – Global Overview
- David Grossman (VP, Policy & Regulatory Affairs, CTA) – North America

Expert insights shared during the launch revealed that Identity and Access Management has become the top investment priority for security leaders as they grapple with the rise of AI agents and sophisticated authentication threats. Currently, 87% of IT leaders view AI-powered risks as their primary concern, highlighting an urgent need for organizations to develop security capacity not just to use AI as a tool, but to protect the AI systems themselves. By acting as a non-political "geopolitical buffer," the Task Force aims to ensure that even if governments disagree, the underlying technical standards and security languages used by businesses remain compatible across borders.

A central pillar of the Task Force's advocacy is preventing market fragmentation, which often results in supply-chain blind spots and "black box" jurisdictions. To combat this, WITSA will advocate for the mutual recognition of voluntary cybersecurity labeling schemes—such as the U.S. Cyber Trustmark—to ensure that products certified in one market meet equivalent standards globally, thereby removing barriers to digital trade.

Moving forward, the initiative will replicate the successful "WITSA AI Task Force" model by establishing a Global Cybersecurity Network and consider organizing dedicated summits to provide member associations with the educational resources needed to mitigate risk and maintain industry competitiveness. To ensure this advocacy is truly global, WITSA has formally committed to strengthening African representation within the Task Force to integrate the continent's unique perspectives and modern security needs into the global roadmap.



# WITSA GLOBAL AI ECOSYSTEM NETWORK:

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Establishing the AI Ecosystem Hub for partner cities and regions across six continents drive innovation and collaboration among diverse stakeholders

The WITSA Global AI Ecosystem Network (WITSA GAIN) is designed to connect AI ecosystems globally, fostering collaboration among governments, industry, startups, academia, and investors. The network is structured around seven core pillars AI infrastructure, talent development, entrepreneurship, use cases, data, public policy, and investments all anchored by WITSA's AI Maturity Model.

Members can now join WITSA GAIN via the complimentary Foundation Membership is available, and have access to AI trend insights, and participation in foundational initiatives shaping AI ecosystems worldwide.

#### The intent:

WITSA GAIN will accelerate AI development through collaboration among innovators, startups, and policymakers, addressing local and global challenges, particularly in underserved regions

#### How it works:

Brings together innovators, startups, researchers, investors, and policymakers to accelerate the development and adoption of AI solutions

#### Impact:

Fosters regional hubs, supports infrastructure mapping, coordinates investments, and enables innovation matchmaking across borders

#### Leveraging International Expertise & Collaborative Knowledge

The WITSA GAIN platform brings together AI leaders from around the world, fostering the exchange of innovative ideas and best practices, making it a truly global knowledge hub

#### Forging Global Partnerships for Regional and International Growth

The network's unique model establishes enduring partnerships that transcend geographical boundaries, enabling members to collaborate with global regions and expand their reach

#### Resource Pooling & Cross-Pollination of Innovations

By uniting diverse AI ecosystems, WITSA GAIN enables the pooling of resources and cross-pollination of groundbreaking solutions, creating synergies that accelerate progress and drive impactful innovation

#### Driving Cross-Border Exports and Collaborative Opportunities

WITSA GAIN fosters international business opportunities, empowering stakeholders to expand exports and establish cross-border collaborations, making it an unparalleled platform for global growth in AI

Reach out to [us](#) to get a briefing on WITSA GAIN

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UPCOMING EVENT

# WITSA GLOBAL AI SUMMIT 2026 (AUGUST/SEPTEMBER)

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## Taiwan Set to Host the Second WITSA Global AI Summit 2026

*Building on the landmark success of the inaugural 2025 summit, WITSA and TISSA are thrilled to bring the world's premier AI leadership forum back to Taipei. Bigger, bolder, and more impactful than ever.*

WITSA and Taiwan Innovative Software and Services Association (TISSA) are excited to announce that Taiwan will once again serve as the proud host of the WITSA Global AI Summit 2026. This prestigious gathering will bring together AI leaders, innovators, policymakers, and industry trailblazers from across the globe to explore the transformative power of artificial intelligence and chart a bold course for a smarter, more inclusive future.

The first edition of the WITSA Global AI Summit, held in Taipei in August 2025, was a landmark moment for the global technology community. The summit saw headline speakers from Google DeepMind, Taiwan's Ministry of Digital Affairs, the Sarawak Digital Economy Corporation, and the Observer Global AI Index, among others. With over 500 delegates from more than 36 economies converging at the Sheraton Grand Taipei Hotel, the summit delivered exceptional value through world-class knowledge sharing, high-level networking, and meaningful policy influence. The stage is now set for an even more ambitious second chapter.

Taiwan has firmly established itself as a powerhouse of technological innovation, a global hub for semiconductor excellence, AI-driven manufacturing, and digital transformation. Its leadership in the AI ecosystem, underscored by the landmark Memorandum of Understanding signed between WITSA and TISSA at last year's summit, makes it the ideal setting for a summit that aspires to shape the future of AI on a global scale.

The partnership between WITSA and TISSA reflects a shared commitment to building a thriving, sustainable, and globally connected AI ecosystem. The 2026 summit will deepen this collaboration, delivering an unrivalled platform for cross-sector dialogue, breakthrough announcements, and transformative partnerships.



UPCOMING EVENT

# WITSA GLOBAL AI SUMMIT 2026 (AUGUST/SEPTEMBER)

WITSA LEADING THE AI TRANSFORMATION

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**Mark Your Calendar!**  
**WITSA Global AI Summit 2026**  
**August/September**  
**Taipei, Taiwan**



## What to Expect at the WITSA Global AI Summit 2026

The 2026 edition of the WITSA Global AI Summit aspires to have :

- High-impact keynotes from global AI leaders, government ministers, and tech visionaries shaping the intelligent age
- Dynamic panel discussions spanning AI governance, trustworthy AI, AI-as-a-Service, healthcare innovation, and the future of intelligent enterprise
- Expanded networking opportunities connecting decision-makers, innovators, and investors from over 80 economies
- Policy influence sessions designed to shape international AI frameworks and standards
- Exclusive showcases of cutting-edge AI deployments and solutions from leading organizations worldwide
- Cultural experiences celebrating Taiwan's rich heritage alongside its forward-looking digital vision

The 2026 edition is set to feature an even more distinguished roster of global thought leaders. details to be announced soon.

## A Summit That Matters

The WITSA Global AI Summit 2026 is a catalyst for global action. Last year's summit culminated in WITSA's AI Call-to-Action, a powerful declaration to accelerate global innovation and inclusive prosperity through artificial intelligence.

The 2026 summit will build on this momentum, driving new commitments, partnerships, and breakthroughs that resonate far beyond the event itself.

Whether you are a government leader seeking to shape AI policy, a business executive driving digital transformation, a researcher pushing the boundaries of the possible, or an innovator ready to showcase your vision to the world, the WITSA Global AI Summit 2026 is your unmissable rendezvous.

The future of AI is being shaped right now. Be part of it. Register Your Interest, contact Ms Emily Barner, [emily@witsa.org](mailto:emily@witsa.org).

Further details of dates, venue, program, and registration will be announced soon. Stay tuned to WITSA's official channels for the latest updates.

# THE INAUGURAL WITSA GLOBAL AI AWARDS 2026

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## WITSA GLOBAL AI AWARDS

— 2026 —

HONORING AI INNOVATION.  
EMPOWERING A BETTER FUTURE.



### **A new recognition program for global AI excellence, and your members are at the center of it**

We are thrilled to announce the official launch of the inaugural WITSA Global AI Awards 2026. This new program is a critical platform for celebrating the future of technology, culminating in a prestigious ceremony during the WITSA Global AI Summit in Taipei this August.

In this era, AI is fundamentally reshaping the global economy. Successful leadership now requires orchestrating human-AI collaboration while maintaining the ethical guardrails that ensure technology serves human benefit. These awards validate and elevate the pioneers of responsible AI, moving the conversation beyond raw capability to meaningful application.

### **A New Strategic Framework: The 2-Tier Process**

The Global AI Awards represent a strategic departure from our traditional centralized model. To ensure local expertise informs our global recognition, we have implemented a two-tier process:

- Tier 1 (National): Member associations take the lead by scouting local innovators and selecting one national nominee per category.
- Tier 2 (Global): A WITSA-appointed Global Judging Panel evaluates these national nominees against an impartial international standard to determine the global winners. As the final judging will take into account the differing levels of AI maturity in WITSA member economies, there may be multiple winners in each category.

# THE INAUGURAL WITSA GLOBAL AI AWARDS 2026

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## Your Global AI Awards Toolkit

To ensure this process is seamless and professional, we have developed a comprehensive toolkit. While the Program Outline serves as your primary "hub" for all links and payment information, it is important to understand the role of each supporting document:

**Standardized Nomination Form:** The mandatory template for all applicants to ensure the Global Panel receives consistent data.

**Scoring Rubric & Evaluation Form:** A pre-populated tool for your association to score candidates using our mandatory 30/30/20/20 weighted criteria (Impact, Scalability, Innovation, and Proven Solution).

**Member Guidance Notes:** Your operational roadmap, providing step-by-step instructions for running your national selection process.

**Promotional Toolkit ("Why Nominate?"):** Persuasive marketing document designed to help you pitch the awards to your top-tier members and local innovators.

**Member & Applicant FAQs:** Standalone guides to answer logistical and technical questions for both your staff and prospective candidates.

## **Getting Started**

The Program Outline contains the category descriptions, the mandatory judging criteria, and direct links to the Stripe payment portal and bank wire invoice for the \$100 USD application fee. Award material folder

## **Critical Deadlines**

Nominations are open NOW!

National Selection: June 15 - July 9, 2026

Submission to Secretariat: July 10, 2026

If you have any questions regarding the categories or the 2-tier process, please contact Anders Halvorsen at [ahalvorsen@witsa.org](mailto:ahalvorsen@witsa.org).

## Seven Categories Spanning the AI Value Chain

The awards recognize excellence across seven distinct categories:

### ***AI Infrastructure***

Honoring the organizations building the scalable, accessible foundations on which the next generation of AI is being developed and deployed.

### ***AI Talent***

Recognizing governments, institutions, and corporations making the most meaningful progress in closing the global AI skills gap and cultivating a future-ready workforce.

### ***AI Entrepreneurship***

Celebrating visionary founders and teams translating cutting-edge AI research into commercially viable, globally scalable ventures.

### ***AI Use Cases***

Showcasing deployed AI applications delivering the most significant, measurable impact across sectors and society.

### ***AI Data***

Recognizing excellence in the governance, management, and strategic utilization of data as the foundational asset of responsible AI.

### ***AI Public Policy***

Honoring governments and institutions that have developed technology-neutral, outcome-based, inclusive, and innovation-enabling governance frameworks for AI.

### ***AI Investment***

Celebrating the investors and ecosystem builders whose capital and strategic support are accelerating transformative AI development worldwide.



# CALLING FOR ARTICLES FROM **MEMBERS**

Send us your events to be included in the next issue of the WITSA Newsletter, write to Azlina Ishak at [azlina@witsa.org](mailto:azlina@witsa.org)

# Be Part of WITSA's Catalytic Platforms

*Are you passionate about making a difference in the global tech community? We invite you to be a catalyst for change by participating in WITSA's nine catalytic platforms.*

*From the World Congress on Innovation & Technology to our Global Awards and AI Ecosystem Network, there's a unique opportunity for everyone to contribute, collaborate, and lead.*

*To get involved, simply reach out to [azlina@witsa.org](mailto:azlina@witsa.org) to learn how you can participate and help shape the future of technology.*



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