

## THE BEACON PAPERS · No. 3

*Foundational papers for humanity in the AI Age — from Boston*

# WHO MAY LEAD?

*The Legitimacy of Global AI Governance*

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*Boston Light, first lighthouse of America, shining since 1716 — three centuries of guiding ships that remain free to choose their course.*

On July 17, 2026, at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai, the leader of China urged the nations of the world to seize the “historic opportunity” of open-source artificial intelligence, and presented his country as the natural convener of global AI governance. A day earlier, twenty-nine states had signed the founding agreement of a new World AI Cooperation Organization, headquartered in Shanghai. The question of who writes the rules of the intelligent

age has moved, in a single week, from the seminar room to the summit stage. It deserves a serious answer — more serious, in fact, than any offered in Shanghai. For the question that matters is not who convenes the largest conference, trains the largest models, or gathers the most signatures. The question is: what makes a claim to govern artificial intelligence legitimate?

## **The Measure**

Every previous technology of power posed a version of this question, and humanity has learned, at great cost, how to answer it. Naval powers were not entitled to write the law of the sea merely because they had the most ships. Nuclear powers were not entitled to write the rules of the atom merely because they had the most warheads. Capability confers responsibility; it has never conferred legitimacy. Legitimacy must come from somewhere else.

For artificial intelligence, the source is unusually easy to identify, because AI is unlike previous technologies of power in one decisive respect: it operates directly upon the human mind. AI systems mediate what citizens see, know, believe, choose, and become. To govern AI is, ultimately, to govern the interface between power and human consciousness. And therefore the test of any government's fitness to lead global AI governance is not its market share, its model weights, or its diplomatic reach. The test is how that government treats the minds of its own citizens.

A state that operates comprehensive surveillance of its own people; that censors what they may read and say; that scores their behavior to condition their obedience; that treats the inner life of the person as territory to be managed — such a state is not offering the world governance. It is offering the world its domestic operating system. The AIWS Constitution for Humanity in the AI Age, initiated in Boston on July 8, 2026, states the principle without ornament: “No government may claim leadership in global AI governance while maintaining systems of digital authoritarianism or mass cognitive control.”

## **One Yardstick for All**

This standard would be worthless if it were a weapon pointed in only one direction. It is not. The same yardstick measures every government and every powerful institution, including those of the open societies. A democracy that permits its information environment to be engineered for engagement and rage; that allows the attention and behavior of its citizens to be harvested, profiled, and auctioned; that lets manipulation be lawful so long as it is profitable — such a democracy is also failing the test, by degree if not by design. The Constitution's standard is the Primacy of the Human Person, and it binds Boston as surely as it binds any other capital. Leadership in the AI Age cannot be claimed by geography, by ideology, or by grievance against a rival. It can only be earned — by any government, anywhere — through demonstrated fidelity to the dignity and mental sovereignty of its own people.

## **Openness of Code Is Not Openness of Society**

The Shanghai argument leans heavily on a single word: open. Open-source models, freely shared, are presented as a public good — and in important respects they are. The sharing of scientific and technical knowledge has always been among civilization’s noblest practices, and nations that contribute open models to the world deserve genuine credit for that contribution. But a category error hides inside the argument. Openness of code is not openness of society. A model whose weights are public, released by a system in which speech is not free, information is not trusted, and the model itself may not answer honestly about the government that shaped it, carries its origins within it. The generosity is real; so is the question it cannot answer. Trust in artificial intelligence is not a property of licenses. It is a property of the entire order that produces, trains, aligns, and deploys the system — which is precisely why the AI Age requires trust standards, provenance, transparency, and accountability that no single state, whatever its market position, can be permitted to define alone.

## **The Alternative Is Not a Rival Bloc**

It would be the easiest response in the world — and the most sterile — to answer one bloc with another: an organization in Shanghai countered by an organization in Washington, each gathering signatures, each calling itself the voice of humanity. That road leads to an AI Age partitioned like the twentieth century, with the human person forgotten in the space between the poles.

The Constitution for Humanity proposes a different architecture. It is not headquartered in any capital and belongs to no single government, corporation, ideology, or power. It does not ask nations to choose a patron; it asks them to accept a principle. Its Article 36 holds the door open to every state on earth — including, expressly, those willing to undertake genuine reform — and provides that the Constitution enters into force among the acceding parties upon ratification by nine states, honoring the wisdom of the first constitutional framers, who understood that the willing must not wait upon the reluctant. Membership is earned by commitment, verified through trust standards, and rewarded with recognition and interoperability among trustworthy AI ecosystems. No conference can confer that legitimacy, and no communiqué can counterfeit it.

## **The Beacon and the Searchlight**

Two kinds of light compete for the AI Age. A searchlight fixes people in its beam: it watches, tracks, profiles, and predicts; it serves the one who holds it. A beacon does the opposite: it illuminates the sea, marks the hidden dangers, and leaves every ship free to choose its own course. Both are technologies of light. Only one is a technology of freedom.

The choice before humanity is therefore not between East and West, nor between one geopolitical bloc and another. It is a choice between two fundamentally different visions of civilization: one in which intelligence becomes an instrument of control, and one in which intelligence becomes an

instrument of human flourishing. No government, however powerful; no corporation, however innovative; and no institution, however influential, possesses an inherent right to lead humanity into the AI Age. Leadership is never inherited from power. It is earned through trust — through respect for the dignity of every person, through the protection of Human Agency, and through the demonstration, in practice rather than in proclamation, that artificial intelligence enlarges freedom rather than narrowing it. Those who seek to lead humanity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence must first demonstrate that they serve humanity. The world does not need a new empire of intelligence. It needs a civilization of trust.

### **A Beacon for Humanity**

The AIWS Constitution for Humanity in the AI Age is not written to oppose any nation. It is written to establish a constitutional standard above every nation. It belongs to no single government, no corporation, no ideology, and no geopolitical bloc; it belongs to Humanity. Any government willing to uphold Human Dignity, Human Agency, Freedom, Democracy, Trust, and Wisdom is invited to walk through its open door. The Constitution does not ask humanity to choose sides. It asks humanity to choose principles.

History will remember not who possessed the largest models or the fastest processors. History will remember who chose to place the human person above power. The nations of the world will decide, in the coming years, which light they sail by. The world does not need a searchlight. It needs a beacon.

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