

GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT SUMMIT (GES) 2026 – SUMMARY REPORT by Bijou Maliabo

Date: April 10, 2026

Location: Hilton Midtown Hotel & United Nations Headquarters, New York City

MORNING SESSION - Hilton Midtown Hotel

Farah Salim Eck, *Managing Director, UNA-USA* Opened the session with these words: The speaker opens by welcoming attendees to the Global Engagement Summit (GES), centered on the theme of building a more effective United Nations. They explain that although the event was originally planned for a smaller UN conference room on May 1st, a unique opportunity allowed it to be moved to the United Nations General Assembly Hall, a historically significant space where global decisions are made. Despite the short notice, over 1,030 participants registered, highlighting strong enthusiasm. The speaker emphasizes the importance of including grassroots voices in conversations about modernizing the UN and connects the summit's mission to the upcoming 250th anniversary of the United States, noting that UN values are closely tied to American ideals. Attendees are challenged to take an active role in shaping this narrative by committing to action—symbolized by using a pen instead of a pencil—to influence, advocate, learn, and educate others. The speech concludes with the introduction of Michael Eaton, who played a key role in making the event and venue possible.

Michael Eaton, *Executive Director, National Model UN*: In his remarks, Michael Eaton welcomes attendees and explains that he serves in multiple roles, including as a volunteer and past president of UNA Minnesota, a National Council member, and his day job as the executive director of a national Model UN program for university students. He describes how these roles came together to help secure the opportunity to move the event from a smaller conference room to the General Assembly Hall. He emphasizes the importance of education and advocacy in strengthening U.S. leadership within the United Nations and highlights the critical role of youth in shaping the future. Eaton encourages participants—especially those involved in Model UN programs at universities and schools—to continue supporting these efforts, as they help prepare the next generation to engage with global issues and to build a better future that includes the UN. He closes by thanking attendees and noting that students participating in Model UN have already gained valuable experience through conferences, position papers, and drafting resolutions.

Then a short video of Model UN was shown for the work that they do.

Then Farah Introduces the next speaker Will Davis who provided fantastic keynotes remarks

Will Davis, *Director, UN Information Center Washington Office*: He begins by acknowledging that the world is facing serious challenges, but instead of focusing on negativity, he highlights signs of hope and progress from his perspective in Washington, D.C. He emphasizes the importance of advocacy and public engagement in maintaining strong U.S. leadership within the United Nations, noting that global stability depends on continued support. He points to encouraging developments, including approximately \$700 million in recent U.S. funding for UN peacekeeping missions and about \$2 billion for humanitarian assistance, along with an initial contribution to the UN's regular budget. However, he also notes that the United States still owes billions in unpaid contributions

and that overall funding remains below expectations. Davis describes a constructive and improving relationship between the UN and U.S. policymakers, with ongoing collaboration in key regions such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Central African Republic, Haiti, Syria, Sudan, and Western Sahara, where peacekeeping and humanitarian efforts are critical. At the same time, he highlights major challenges, including political gridlock in the UN Security Council, ongoing global conflicts, and competition among major powers like the United States, China, and Russia. Despite these obstacles, he stresses that the UN continues to play a vital role through its agencies and missions worldwide. He also points to the upcoming selection of a new UN Secretary-General as an important opportunity to strengthen international cooperation. Davis concludes by emphasizing that the audience's work in education, advocacy, and engagement is more important than ever in supporting the UN's mission to address global challenges and save lives.

Then Farah introduced to the stage Moderator: Ishaan Shah, *Global Lead Next Generation Fellow, Our Future Agenda, UN Foundation*, Rory Mondschein, *Coalition for the UN We Need*, Nina Brandt, *Chief, Partnerships, Advocacy and Communications, UN Youth Office*, Aziel Philippos Goulandris, *Secretary-General, World Federation of United Nations Associations*.

The panel discussion focused on how to improve the United Nations to better serve people worldwide. Eshan Shaw introduced the topic by asking what changes are needed to make the UN more effective. The panelist emphasized that the UN should focus more on **people-centered multilateralism**, meaning its work should directly reflect and impact everyday lives, not just governments. They highlighted the need for **greater participation from youth and civil society**, more **representation and reform in global governance**, and updating the UN to reflect today's world rather than its 1945 structure. They also stressed the importance of **making the UN more accessible**, including through hybrid opportunities, and **connecting global decisions to local communities** so people can better understand and engage with its work.

Breakout Sessions (attendees had the opportunity to attend the sessions that interested them)

Flash Talks: UN Agencies, Programs & Funds

Career Connex

Beyond the Blue Beret: Women's Leadership in Global Peacekeeping

AFTERNOON SESSION - UN HEADQUARTERS GA HALL

Opening Plenary

AKASH PATEL UNA-USA NATIONAL COUNCIL CHAIR; *Opened the session with thanking everyone for attending the summit at the UN HEADQUARTER GA and introduced Melissa Flemming.*

Melissa Flemming UN under-secretary General for Global Communications; Melissa Fleming explained that her role at the UN is to act as a **global storyteller**, sharing accurate and reliable information about the UN's work across media platforms worldwide. She emphasized that today's world is driven by **technology and social media**, where about **60% of young people under 26 get their information**, but this space is often filled with **misinformation, harmful content, and misleading influencers**. She warned that this has created a serious crisis of trust and can negatively impact democracy, mental health, and even lead to issues like **youth suicide linked to harmful online content**. Fleming stressed that **time is running out to address global challenges like climate change**, and misinformation is making it harder to take action to protect the planet. She called for stronger efforts to **promote truthful, science-based information with dignity**, and to create a safer digital environment that protects children. She also highlighted that technology platforms operate as a business, often amplifying harmful content, which must be addressed. Finally, she encouraged everyone, especially youth, to **join forces, take responsibility, and spread accurate information about the UN**, emphasizing that real change depends on individuals working together to inform others and make a positive impact.

PANEL: featuring Chris Sharrock (Microsoft vis- President UN affairs), Rakib Anam (Navy Federal Credit Union System) and Claire Melamed (UN Foundation/ Vice President AI & Digital Cooperation Strategy). They discussed how major sectors like tech companies and financial institutions play a critical role in supporting UN goals, from economic development to global cooperation. The conversation highlighted both the **opportunities and risks of digital transformation**, including the impact of AI on society, the importance of responsible innovation, and the need for collaboration between governments, private companies, and international organizations. Overall, they emphasized that shaping the future of technology and finance must be done carefully to ensure it benefits people worldwide and aligns with the UN's mission.

Then Paul Presendieu (UNA-USA National Council Secretary & GES Advisory Committee Chair introduced Stephane Dujarric

Stephane Dujarric, United Nation Spokesperson for UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres spoke Stéphane Dujarric emphasized the importance of grassroots engagement and the role of participants in supporting multilateralism, international law, and human rights. He highlighted that the work being done through organizations like USA UNA is not just advocacy, but an act of hope and inspiration that strengthens the UN's mission. He stressed that people's participation and time invested in conferences and community engagement help defend shared global values at a time when international law is under serious pressure. Dujarric warned that these principles are not only being challenged at the margins but are under direct strain globally. He reinforced the importance of continued commitment, stating that supporting the UN system requires active involvement and belief in cooperation. Quoting the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, he reminded the audience that **"the force of law must always prevail over the law of force."**

Then Farah Closed and we were dismissed

There was a brief meeting for the National Council who attended the summit that was held in the presidential suite of the Hilton Midtown Hotel @ 7pm following the 2026 Global Engagement Summit. I was not able to attend the meeting but it was very brief.

From Neema Maliabo:

On April 10, we attended the UNA-USA Global Engagement Summit in New York City, where global leaders, students, and advocates came together to discuss the pressing issues of peacekeeping and the role of collaboration in addressing peacekeeping.

One of the most impactful breakout sessions had focused on women's leadership in global peacekeeping. This discussion helped clarify what peacekeeping means and why it is so important, while emphasizing the critical role women play in these efforts. I was able to meet the perfect example of women in peacekeeping—Lieutenant Seitebatso Pearl Block, who had spoken about her experience working with the United Nations mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was beyond inspiring to see a woman like Lieutenant Seitebatso Pearl Block actively contributing to global peace efforts.

In the afternoon, artist Teeks had performed using his musical ability to communicate the importance of unity and shared vision in a way that was not only powerful but personal, reminding everyone that peacekeeping and the UN is through the effort of everyone together. Another discussion that stood out to me was the discussion of how American sports like basketball can be used as a form of global diplomacy. It reminded me that influence isn't just pushed through politics, but that it can come from culture and connection.

Overall, the UNA-USA Global Engagement Summit has reminded me once again that leadership and impact sees no age and sees no limit. This year's theme has made me understand that peacekeeping isn't just a word, it's a movement. Throughout the entirety of the day, what made this summit truly worth the travel was the exceeding number of youth who had participated in this year's summit. Sessions that discussed AI and social media—all of which are surrounded by my generation—gave youth the opportunity to understand, represent, and focus on what these tools can mean for our future. Seeing college, high school, and even down to middle school students was something beyond inspiring. To firsthand witness my peers represent the same resilience I have towards building a more effective UN gave me hope in knowing that I was never alone in my passion, work, and dedication towards the future. GES has given me encouragement to push forward as a leader as I see my peers attending the same summit with the same idea—change.