

Young Leaders Consider AI Ethics, Peacebuilding and the Power of Trust

Youth Leadership and Peacebuilding Programme | 8 August 2026
| Online

Key Takeaways

AI needs human judgement

Young people need critical thinking, independent knowledge and verification skills to use artificial intelligence responsibly.

Peacebuilding begins with relationships

Dialogue, empathy, shared purpose and personal relationships can create the trust required to overcome political, religious and community divisions.

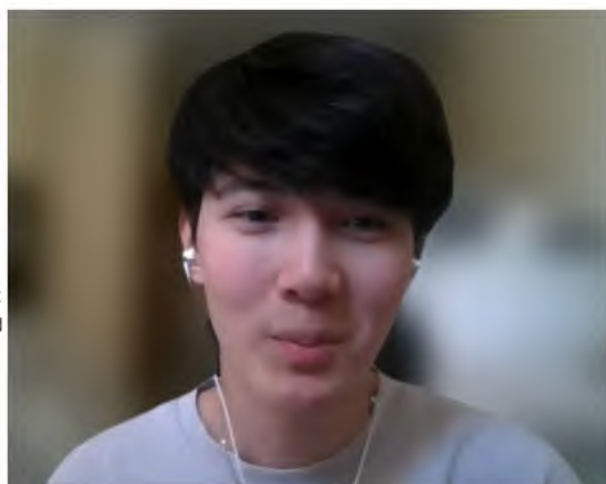
Trust makes conflict resolution possible

From Track II diplomacy to neighbourhood initiatives, trust often develops through personal contact, shared experiences and consistent relationships.

Young people explored the challenges of ethical leadership in the age of artificial intelligence alongside practical approaches to peacebuilding, dialogue and conflict resolution during a [Universal Peace Federation UK](#) youth leadership programme on 8 August 2026.

The online session brought together presentations from **Dr Lance Gardiner**, **David Fraser-Harris** and **Paul Gutteridge**, followed by questions, discussion and breakout groups in which participants considered how the ideas could be applied in their own lives and communities.

Moderated by **Brendan Gardiner**, the programme connected two rapidly developing areas of leadership: understanding the opportunities and ethical challenges created by artificial intelligence, and developing the trust, communication and relationships required to prevent and resolve conflict.



Ethical Leadership in the AI Age

Opening the programme, **Dr Lance Gardiner** examined the growing influence of artificial intelligence across four areas: the environment, education, employment and the creative arts.

While AI offers enormous potential to increase productivity, expand access to knowledge and support innovation, Dr Gardiner highlighted some of the ethical questions accompanying its rapid development.

He drew attention to the significant energy and water requirements associated with AI infrastructure and data centres, as well as the potential impact of automation on employment.



Education presents another challenge. Dr Gardiner referred to research indicating that students can perform considerably better while using AI tools, but may struggle when those tools are subsequently removed. This raised an important question for young people: **how can AI enhance learning without replacing the development of knowledge, judgement and independent thinking?**

During an interactive poll participants were evenly divided between feeling positive about AI and being undecided. Deepfakes and

misinformation emerged as the greatest ethical concern.

Responding to a question about becoming overly dependent on AI, Dr Gardiner emphasised the importance of maintaining and testing foundational knowledge independently of technology.

The discussion also considered whether innovation, greater energy efficiency and renewable-powered data centres could reduce AI's environmental impact.

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Peacebuilding Through Relationships

David Fraser-Harris, Secretary General of UPF Europe and the Middle East, then introduced participants to UPF's approach to peacebuilding and its experience of bringing people together across political, religious and cultural divisions.



Guided by UPF's co-founders, [Rev Dr Sun Myung Moon](#) and [Dr Hak Ja Han](#), this approach, he explained, are relatively simple human qualities: being friendly, showing genuine concern for others, listening and creating opportunities for dialogue. These are the natural implications of UPF's peace building vision of [interdependence](#), [mutual prosperity](#) and [shared universal values](#).

Drawing on examples from UPF's international work, he referred to peace and reconciliation initiatives involving **Nepal, Liberia, Syria and the Middle East**, as well as decades of interfaith cooperation.

UPF initiatives have ranged from dialogue among religious and political leaders to youth service programmes, character education and sport-based peacebuilding.

One principle running through these different approaches is the importance of identifying a **shared higher purpose**. Dialogue becomes difficult when participants focus only on competing interests. Trust can grow when people recognise a goal or value that transcends those differences.

Questions from participants demonstrated how international concerns connect with practical peacebuilding.

One participant raised the experience of the people of Somaliland and the need for greater recognition and justice. Another described humanitarian initiatives involving water projects in Yemen and mental health support for women. David encouraged participants to make use of networks and relationships that can help connect local initiatives with people capable of supporting them.

Trust as the Currency of Conflict Resolution

The third presentation featured a recorded contribution from **Paul Gutteridge**, founder of Track 2 Talks and an Honorary Fellow at the University of Birmingham's Edward Cadbury Centre.

His presentation focused on **Track II diplomacy** — creating spaces where relationships and conversations can develop outside formal governmental negotiations.

Paul described **trust as the currency of conflict resolution**.

Before difficult political or community disagreements can be addressed, peacebuilders often need to identify influential individuals on different sides, reduce the risks associated with meeting and create neutral environments in which conversations can begin.

Trust, he explained, can sometimes grow through surprisingly ordinary things: **proximity, sharing food and spending time**



together.

Entering another person's community or territory as their guest can itself communicate respect and vulnerability.

Track II diplomacy can therefore enable conversations that government officials or political leaders may find difficult to conduct publicly. Ideas and relationships developed informally can later contribute to official diplomatic or decision-making processes.

David Fraser-Harris noted the close connection between this approach and UPF's own experience: rather than beginning with areas of disagreement, peacebuilders can search for a higher value or common objective around which relationships can develop.

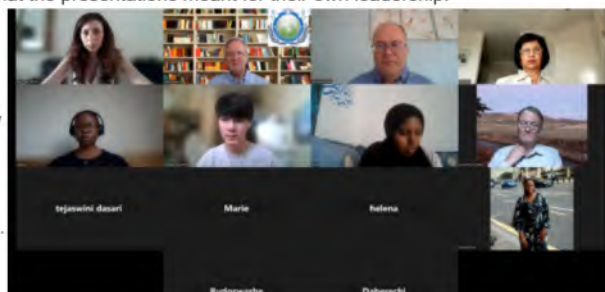
From Global Challenges to Personal Leadership

Participants then moved into breakout groups to consider what the presentations meant for their own leadership.

Several common themes emerged.

Young people recognised that using AI ethically requires **critical thinking and verification**, rather than automatically trusting information generated by technology.

Participants also suggested that ethical leadership means maintaining consistent values regardless of who is watching. Leadership is demonstrated through example rather than position alone.



The discussions emphasised that peacebuilding does not always begin with governments or large organisations. Checking on a neighbour, volunteering, bringing people together or taking responsibility for a problem within one's community can all contribute to creating greater trust.

Another important conclusion was that young leaders do not need to solve every problem by themselves. Networks, partnerships and relationships allow people with complementary skills and resources to work together.

The session ultimately connected technological change with one of the oldest challenges of leadership: **how human beings build relationships of trust**.

Whether responding to artificial intelligence, community tensions or international conflict, participants were encouraged to develop critical judgement, personal integrity, empathy and the ability to communicate across differences.

These qualities will be increasingly important for a generation of young leaders navigating a world in which technological capabilities are advancing rapidly, while the need for dialogue, trust and human connection remains as important as ever.

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