

UN tech agency rolls out human-looking robots for questions at a Geneva news conference

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Robots are presented during a press conference with a panel of AI-enabled humanoid social robots as part of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 'AI for Good' global summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Friday, July 07, 2023. Nine AI-enabled humanoid robots sat or stood with their creators at a podium in a Geneva conference center on Friday for what the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union billed as the world's first news conference featuring humanoid social robots. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP

A United Nations technology agency assembled a group of robots that physically resembled humans at a news conference Friday, inviting reporters to ask them questions in an event meant to spark discussion about [the future of artificial intelligence](#).

The nine robots were seated and posed upright along with some of the people who helped make them at a podium in a Geneva conference center for what the U.N.'s International Telecommunication Union billed as the world's first news conference featuring humanoid social robots.

Among them: Sophia, the first robot innovation ambassador for the U.N. Development Program, or UNDP; Grace, described as a health care robot; and Desdemona, a rock star [robot](#). Two, Geminoid and Nadine, resembled their makers.

Organizers said the event at the AI for Good Global Summit was meant to showcase the capabilities, but also the limitations, of robotics and how those technologies could help the U.N.'s sustainable development goals. The media event featured introductions from the robots' companions or creators, and a round of questions to the robots from reporters.

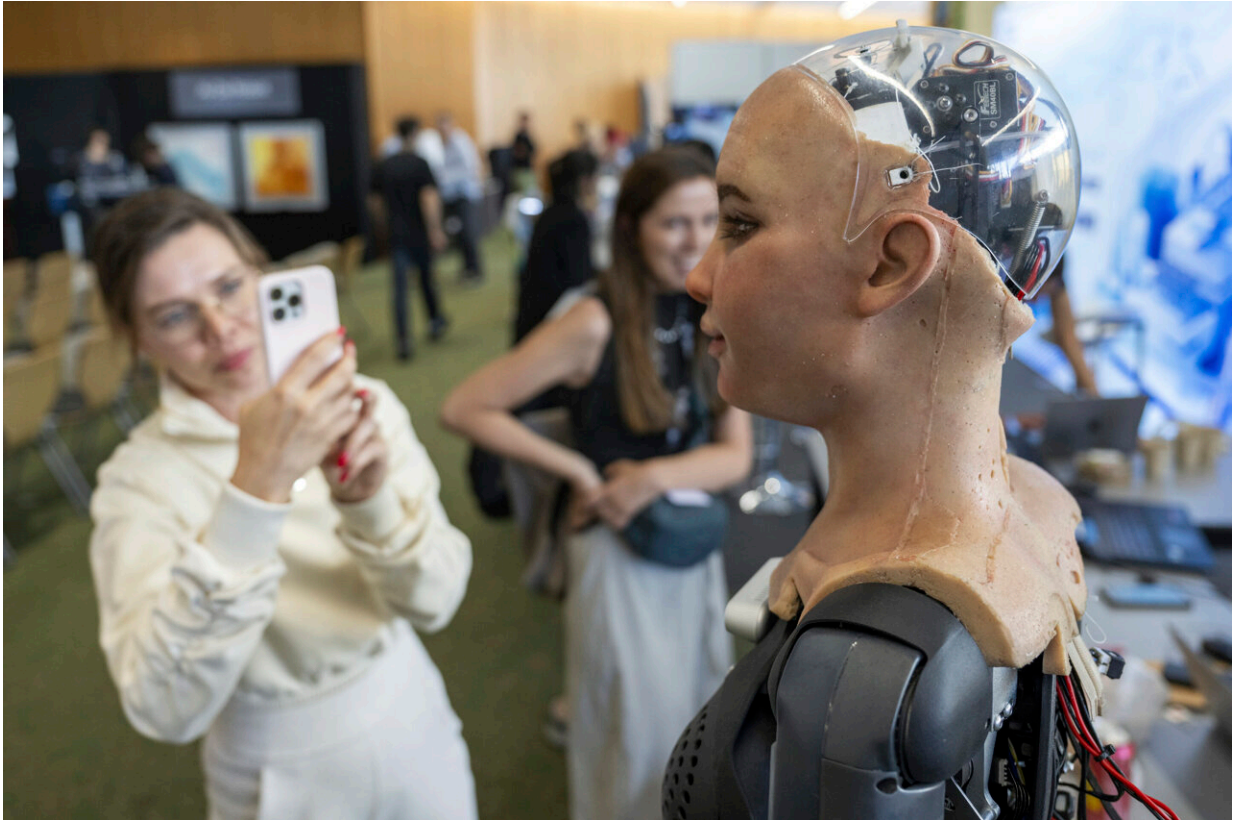
And while the robots vocalized strong statements—that robots could be more efficient leaders than humans, but wouldn't take anyone's job away or stage a rebellion—organizers didn't specify to what extent the answers were scripted or programmed by people.



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Robots are seen on the podium during a press conference with a panel of AI-enabled humanoid social robots as part of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 'AI for Good' global summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Friday, July 07, 2023. Nine AI-enabled humanoid robots sat or stood with their creators at a podium in a Geneva conference center on Friday for what the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union billed as the world's first news conference featuring humanoid social robots. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP



Humanoid robot Sophia is pictured during the ITU's AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Wednesday, July 5 2023. Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics innovators and their high-tech creations will join diplomats, industry executives, academics, policy-makers, and UN partners in Geneva from July 6-7 for ITU's AI for Good Global Summit. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP



Geminoid, a ultra-realistic humanoid robot from Japan, is seen during a press conference with a panel of AI-enabled humanoid social robots as part of International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 'AI for Good' global summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Friday, July 07, 2023. Nine AI-enabled humanoid robots sat or stood with their creators at a podium in a Geneva conference center on Friday for what the United Nations' International Telecommunication Union billed as the world's first news conference featuring humanoid social robots. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP



Humanoid robot Hiroshi 6 is pictured during the ITU's AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Wednesday, July 5 2023. Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics innovators and their high-tech creations will join diplomats, industry executives, academics, policy-makers, and UN partners in Geneva from July 6-7 for ITU's AI for Good Global Summit. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP



Humanoid robot Ameca is pictured during the ITU's AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Wednesday, July 5 2023. Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics innovators and their high-tech creations will join diplomats, industry executives, academics, policy-makers, and UN partners in Geneva from July 6-7 for ITU's AI for Good Global Summit. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP



Nadia Thalmann, right, from the University of Geneva poses next to Humanoid robot Nadine during the ITU's AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Wednesday, July 5 2023. Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics innovators and their high-tech creations will join diplomats, industry executives, academics, policy-makers, and UN partners in Geneva from July 6-7 for ITU's AI for Good Global Summit. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP



Humanoid robot Ai-Da is pictured during the ITU's AI for Good Global Summit in Geneva, Switzerland, Wednesday, July 5 2023. Artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics innovators and their high-tech creations will join diplomats, industry executives, academics, policy-makers, and UN partners in Geneva from July 6-7 for ITU's AI for Good Global Summit. Credit: Martial Trezzini/Keystone via AP

The summit was meant to showcase "[human](#)-machine collaboration," and some of the robots are capable of producing preprogrammed responses, according to their documentation. The UNDP's Sophia, for example, sometimes relies on responses scripted by a team of writers at Hanson Robotics, the company's website shows.

Reporters were asked to speak slowly and clearly when addressing the robots, and were informed that time lags in responses would be because

of the [internet connection](#) and not the robots themselves. That didn't prevent awkward pauses, audio problems and some stilted or inconsistent replies.

Popular tech products such as Apple's Siri have been using speech recognition technology to respond to relatively simple human queries for more than a decade. But last year's release of ChatGPT, a chatbot with a strong command of the semantics and syntax of human language, has triggered worldwide debate about the rapid advancement of AI systems.

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