UN chief cites the promise and perils of dizzying new technology as 'AI for Good' conference opens

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OpenAI CEO Sam Altman participates in a discussion during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation CEO Summit, Nov. 16, 2023, in San Francisco. The U.N. telecommunications agency has kicked off its annual AI for Good conference in hopes of guiding business, consumers and governments on ways to tap the promise of the new technology but avoid its potential perils. OpenAI chief Sam Altman whose company created ChatGPT is among the tech leaders

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OpenAI chief Sam Altman, whose company created ChatGPT, is among the tech leaders to join the Geneva gathering on Thursday as the two-day event hosts speeches and talks on artificial intelligence applications for robotics, medicine, education, sustainable development and much more.

"Artificial intelligence is changing our world and our lives," U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said by video, noting its promise for things like education and health care in remote areas, increasing crop yields, and early warning systems for natural disasters.

While artificial intelligence has been developed for years, its application for consumers burst into public view 18 months ago when OpenAI launched ChatGPT, a standout among AI systems that churn out novel text, images and video based on a vast database of online writings, books and other media.

Other corporate titans like Google, Microsoft and Amazon are vigorously competing in AI too.

OpenAI has been battling a rising tide of concern about how it handles AI safety—including criticism from former top executives who recently left the company.

Experts warn that AI could supercharge the spread of online disinformation: With a few typed commands and requests, computer-generated texts and images can be spread on social media and across the Internet—blurring the line between fake news and reality.

"Transforming its potential into reality requires AI that reduces bias, misinformation and security threats, instead of aggravating them," Guterres said, insisting it must also involve helping developing countries "harness AI for themselves" and "connecting the unconnected" around the world.