

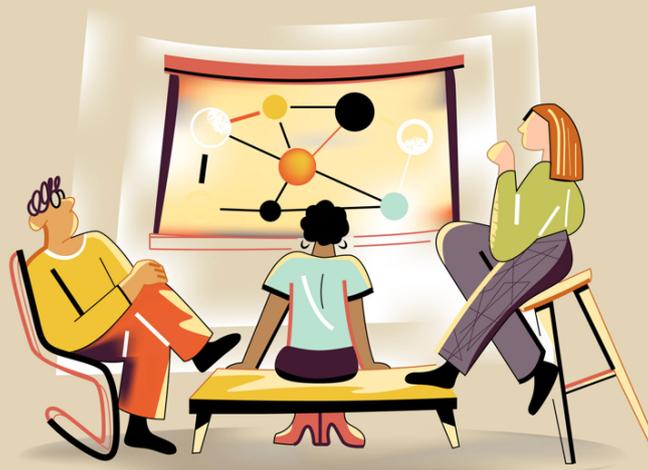


TfD

Submission to the People's Consultation on AI

By Tech Workers Coalition Canada & Technologists for Democracy

Event date: March 9, 2026



Learn more:

People's Consultation on AI (peoplesaiconsultation.ca)

Tech Workers Coalition Canada (techworkerscoalition.org/canada)

Technologists for Democracy (techfordemocracy.ca)

Tl;dr. *Tech Workers Coalition (TWC) Canada and Technologists for Democracy (TfD) jointly collaborated to organize a People's Consultation on AI community event on March 9, 2026. We asked participants to share their thoughts on four topics: (i) Impact on labour in the production of AI, (ii) impact on labour from deployment of AI in the workplace, (iii) privacy, and (iv) human rights and democracy. Participants discussed strategies for building collective power as a safeguard against AI's harmful impact on labour and civil society. Participants also proposed several demands to the Government of Canada in reconsideration of their National AI Strategy, including: (i) Co-develop regulations with communities, (ii) develop AI as publicly owned infrastructure, (iii) ban AI from being deployed for surveillance, (iv) stronger labour protections for workers, (v) regulatory bodies must protect itself from big tech regulatory capture, and (vi) enforce existing laws.*

1 Why TWC and TfD

Tech Workers Coalition Canada and Technologists for Democracy are both endorsing organizations for the People's Consultation on AI. The Tech Workers Coalition is about building up rank-and-file capabilities as tech workers to organize the workplace to move in a more positive direction. Technologists for Democracy is a grassroots advocacy organization consisting largely of technologists, whose mandate is to keep use of technology accountable to the public. Many of the members of both groups are involved with the production of tech and regularly encounter its deployment in the workplace, and have serious concerns about how unaccountable this technology is to the public.

2 Process

We hosted a people's consultation community event at 1RG on Monday, March 9th, 2026. We had around 30 in-person participants with 10 participants online. We initiated the proceedings with a "Territorial and technological acknowledgment" (see appendix) followed by a panel discussion that includes four speakers before breaking out into five breakout groups, with four in-person and one virtual. These breakout groups addressed the following topics:

- Impact on labour in the production of AI
- Impact on labour from deployment of AI in the workplace
- Privacy
- Human rights and democracy

The virtual breakout addressed all these topics. We had four guiding prompts:

- What are your **personal experiences** with AI?
- What are your **biggest concerns and hopes** around AI?
- What do you feel is **important that regulators know** about AI?
- Beyond this event, how can we **build collective power** to keep regulators and companies in check?



Figure 1: Photo of the panel session with panelists Ana Brandusescu, Andrew Do, and Cynthia Khoo joining virtually, and panelist Camila Justino and panel moderator Bhaskar Mitra present in-person.

Throughout the discussion, we took notes and asked participants to also write their thoughts out on sticky notes. We summarized the conversation and the notes manually. No LLMs were used in any part of our process.

3 Summary of panel discussion

This People's Consultation on AI event began with a panel discussion. The panelists included:

- **Ana Brandusescu** is a researcher, policy analyst and advisor with a background in open data, open government, and digital rights, currently finishing her PhD in human geography on government chatbots, privatization, and political power in the scale of AI governance.
- **Andrew Do** is an organizing committee member of TWC Canada, a rank-and-file OPEIU 153 tech worker member and a volunteer with EWOC (Emergency Workplace Organizing Committee, a “911” of workplace organizing) who contributed to resources on workplace organizing around how AI is deployed in the workplace.
- **Camila Justino** is a writer and data trainer working for an AI company. She holds an MA from the Women and Gender Studies Institute at the University of Toronto. As a writer, she explores themes of language, migration, and motherhood.
- **Cynthia Khoo** is the founder of and principal lawyer at Tekhnos Law, and a senior fellow at the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto.
- **Bhaskar Mitra** (*panel moderator*) is an independent researcher working on AI-mediated online information access and questions of social justice and emancipation in the context of these sociotechnical systems.

The panel discussion began with the panelists recognizing the deeply misguided and inadequate approach to public consultation conducted by the Minister of AI and Digital Innovation Evan Solomon on Canada's AI strategy last October. Panelists presented a brief summary of how the People's Consultation on AI came about in response to the lack of Canadian government's genuine consultation with the Canadian civil society and workers.

The panelists discussed several pressing concerns about AI in the Canadian context. This includes the double-standard being applied to Canadian AI companies; whereas there has been at least some critique of Big Tech and other AI companies based in the US with respect to the harm they are unleashing on civil society and workers, Canadian AI companies (e.g., Cohere) seem to be getting a free pass under the cover of Canadian digital sovereignty interests. Panelists shared concerns about how the space for refusal is narrowing, and corporations are flooding the zone with AI propaganda to promote false narratives about the inevitability of so-called "AI" in every aspect of our lives. The lack of safeguards for the need to consent is becoming an increasingly serious issue, as workers are being asked to use AI irrespective of whether they find these tools beneficial. The panelists emphasized the power of collective organizing, both in the workplace and in civic spaces, to build counterpowers to resist the AI invasion. The panelists also talked about the unsatisfactory working conditions for those who engage in data labour in the production of AI, and the need for worker organizing to demand better recognition and compensation for data work.

The panelists then engaged in a discussion on how to safeguard the interests of workers and civil society from the exploitation and extractive practices of AI companies. Panelists underscored the need for stronger labour protection laws and stricter enforcement of existing labour and copyright protection laws against powerful corporate actors. Panelists also earnestly demanded that the Canadian government listen to academic experts, workers, and civil society who are their actual constituents instead of parroting corporate propaganda. The need for public education (including the demystification of how these technologies actually work) and the need for legal measures against AI dark patterns and practices (e.g., anthropomorphizing of AI) was emphasized. Labour organizing and normalizing refusal was again brought up as critical in this struggle. Finally, the need for stronger whistleblower protection was stressed upon.

4 Impact on labour in the production of AI

In current workplace experiences, there is a high level of disillusionment with managers and supervisors encouraging the use of LLMs for everything, regardless of whether they are appropriate for a particular problem. Workers who are fluent in AI understand the technology and believe that they should decide when to use it. There is often both carrot and stick for workers to use AI as part of their workflow. Furthermore, there are not enough conversations with people who produce AI as part of the AI supply chain that is often overlooked and made invisible. This group observed that AI has helped workers understand their identity as workers.

This group also observed the need to rebalance power in AI. This group observed the concentration of ownership of this technology with a small group of market players. There are few spaces to congregate that are not captured by big tech that limits independent research around AI. This concentration of power distorts the full breadth of direction around the development of AI that benefits the existing status quo market players while effectively suppressing alternative perspectives. This can only be remedied with a direct conversation about rebalancing the power that

incumbent market players have.

Lastly, this group also discussed datacentres. Datacentres are the physical infrastructure that form part of the AI supply chain. All of these datacentres are in private hands in service to the incumbent market players but none of them are in the hands of people. The demand for datacentres exceeds the existing supply for them which suggests a point of leverage for communities. Indeed, datacentres are often a point around which communities mobilize around to demand more of their legislators to regulate, if not outright revoke, the build-out of datacentres.

5 Impact on labour from deployment of AI in the workplace

This breakout group focused their discussion on the implications and risks to workers in the context of the deployment of AI in the workplace. Participants acknowledged that the technology is useful in certain domains, such as for coding applications. However, the actual usefulness of AI is often sporadic (i.e., it generates useful responses for some use-cases but not others) and unpredictable. Regardless, the actual benefit does not offset the harms of the technology incurred both at the time of its production (e.g., uncompensated appropriation of intellectual and creative work produced by people and under-compensated data work, both critical in training of large AI models) and in its deployment in the workplace.

The participants discussed the need to consider AI as more than just a technological project; specifically the need for critical perspectives on the political project of AI. The high valuation of AI today is primarily driven by its purported potential to negotiate down the cost of labour. There was a brief discussion about how “AI automation” is different from historical examples of technological automations. Specifically, the metaphor of automating a horse-carriage was employed in the discussion. While classical approaches to automation would attempt to replace the carriage with an automobile, AI automation is more akin to replacing the driver with a stochastic model that tries to predict the driver’s decision at every stage, with the driver still in place holding the reins of the model (i.e., supervising the model’s functions). This might reduce the social and economic status of the work being performed by the driver while also making them liable for the model’s errors (i.e., turning them into the model’s “moral crumple zone”). False corporate narratives such as claims that AI will replace workers (or substantially simplify their work) in essential services—e.g., healthcare and education—is further providing political cover for the dismantling of public services.

The group discussed the issue of deploying AI in scenarios where there exists significant power differences making it impossible for people to refuse consent in the use of AI. This includes uses in immigration processes (where vulnerable immigrants are not in a position to deny AI usage) or the forced use of AI in the workplace (where workers are unable to push back on these demands). The group was concerned about ongoing instances where AI usage is being tied to employee performance evaluation, and the potential for such cases increasing in the future. The hype around AI is being further weaponized in these scenarios by higher management to demand workers to produce more for lesser compensation, irrespective of whether the usage of AI is actually reducing their workload to the extent it is claimed by management or in cases where it even results in further intensification of work. Members of the breakout group also shared examples of instances when their concerns about privacy were brushed off by higher management.

The breakout group also discussed how alongside the push for AI we are also observing a rise in employee surveillance and pseudoscientific measures of worker productivity (e.g., invalid claims that AI tools can measure how engaged

employees are during meetings based on automatic detection of online meeting recordings or measuring their productivity based on their digital activities at work). The primary goal here seems to be to create a culture of fear to extract more labour from workers while simultaneously suppressing wages. Integration of AI-based workflows are treating employees as cogs in an automated system depriving them of agency and pride in their craft, worsening employees' mental health and economic wellbeing, while also negatively impacting the quality of products and other outcomes.

Participants then moved on to spend the remaining time in the discussion to contemplate potential guardrails for AI and strategies for community resistance.

Participants emphasized the need for government regulations and interventions to protect workers from forced usage of AI, and codify their right of refusal. These interventions need to also push the onus of providing evidentiary support for productivity improvements from AI on to higher management—i.e., any claims from higher management about the productivity boost from AI (that leads either to demanding higher output from workers or reducing their wages) must be supported by concrete evidence that higher management provides specific to the context of the work in question (note: productivity improvements in one domain may not necessarily translate to equivalent improvements in other domains or specific project contexts). Participants also mentioned the need to safeguard data rights of workers to prevent their data being used to train AI models that lead to their further displacement in the future.

Participants also engaged in a discussion about alternative approaches to AI development that Canada could explore and potentially be a positive leading example for the rest of the world. Participants ideated on how we could develop community-controlled AI infrastructure, and probed whether AI companies are really selling AI or selling cloud compute with AI being a value-added service. Radical possibilities such as nationalizing all cloud computing infrastructure in Canada and putting it under democratic governance was discussed. This could potentially create fairer market competition where more companies are able to compete on building better models without requiring high startup computing costs while also making it less likely for oligopolistic control over the AI market from emerging. This could enable a higher rate of innovation and make the conditions appropriate for deriving more value from open-weight AI models.

The participants also discussed the need to stop government subsidies to private corporations and stricter guarantees that people's utility bills (e.g., for water and electricity) would not go up due to new datacentre developments. Participants emphasized the need for stricter environment regulations (e.g., to prevent any additional coal plants from coming online or delaying their deprecation to meet the additional energy needs of AI datacentres). Stricter land protections are also necessary in light of proposed new datacentre projects, respecting in particular Indigenous sovereignty and custodianship over the land of Turtle Island.

Participants also briefly touched upon the need for new frameworks for AI development centring societal and worker needs—e.g., building AI systems for work that prioritize the needs and safety of workers, not the profit incentive of their bosses.

Ultimately, the role of public education and building strong worker and civil society movements was emphasized as necessary steps to safeguard public interest. It was also pointed out that we should not centre AI debates on whether the tech itself can be useful in particular context, but shift the debate to the structural harms and societal risks of AI.

As a concluding note, participants were also wary of “digital sovereignty” narratives and expressed apprehension that it may serve as a cover for promoting ultranationalism and further concentration of power in corporate hands

in the name of national interests.

6 Privacy

This breakout group coalesced on the idea that the exercise of privacy is the exercise of agency. When you do not own your personal data, you forfeit control to third parties who do not necessarily have your own best interests in mind. Participants discussed how AI has become a metaphorical “backdoor” to personal data, by enabling large-scale extraction and processing of data.

Participants discussed how individuals can protect their own data with self-hosted AI systems that keep data locally, as opposed to sending it off to third parties for processing. Participants also discussed other ways of protecting one's own privacy, such as being cautious of signing up for services online, switching to alternative operating systems like GrapheneOS, and using counteroffensive AI tools such as Nightshade to protect one's own art.

Participants reflected on how older technologies like IRC preserved anonymity by default (even if not actually secure), and were protocols uncontrolled by a single entity, unlike most apps today (e.g., YouTube, Facebook, Discord).

Participants highlighted how preventing monopolies and consolidation of power can protect people from data exploitation. Participants recognized how privacy can protect other civil liberties such as the right to housing, the right to freedom of movement and the right to not be arbitrarily detained. For examples regarding algorithmic pricing, flight ticket vendors such as Expedia, and rent pricing management software such as RealPage would be more restricted in exploiting individuals if personal data enjoyed more legal protections. For an example regarding surveillance, organizations like the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency would not be as oppressive if people's privacy were respected.

Finally, participants came to a consensus on how federal agencies like the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) and the Competition Bureau should do more to prevent consolidation of power. Participants expressed interest in Crown services that would treat the internet as digital public infrastructure (“digital sovereignty”), in the same way that roads and highways are publicly-owned infrastructure. Participants also expressed a desire for open protocols as alternatives to privately-owned apps and digital infrastructure. Participants expressed a need to move towards an internet that is collectively owned and governed to ensure that the people have the power to refuse surveillance.

7 Human Rights and Democracy

This breakout group focused on the interactions, hopes and concerns surrounding AI technologies and democratic systems. Participants reflected on democracy's reliance on checks and balances, and reliance on the protection of universal rights and freedoms, such as the freedom of the press and the right to peaceful assembly. Participants discussed how many AI systems pose threats to democratic systems if left unchecked.

Breakout group participants discussed how AI can erode critical thinking skills—for example, there is a danger in believing in LLMs that are very confident in their responses, even when details are hallucinated. Participants were

concerned about the ability of many AI systems to speak convincingly to people about topics they are not experts in.

Participants expressed a desire for a more locally democratic process in deployment and decision-making around AI. Participants expressed concerns around the framing of AI as inevitable innovation and its supposed requisite development as an arms race.

Participants also expressed concerns around Canada's current Minister of Artificial Intelligence and Digital Innovation, Minister Evan Solomon. Specifically, Minister Solomon lacks a technical background nor has he studied the societal or democratic implications of widespread AI usage.

Participants discussed how AI and technology more broadly have continually promised to reduce the amount of labour that workers need to provide. But instead of improving worker rights or general human rights, participants discussed how AI has:

- **Enabled worker exploitation:** Many workers who label the data that feeds into AI systems are underpaid and reside in countries with few human rights protections.
- **Enabled mass surveillance:** With the development of facial and biometric recognition systems, the collection and analysis of massive amounts of audiovisual data can now be automated. This is a risk to the fundamental human right to privacy.
- **Eroded the concept of truth:** It has become increasingly difficult to discern between falsified AI-generated content and authentic human-created content.
- **Reinforced inequality:** For example, with surveillance pricing becoming more common (also called algorithmic pricing or dynamic pricing), these AI systems risk further disadvantaging minorities and people with less means as they are less able to avoid periods of highly exploitative prices. When surveillance pricing is applied to “optimize” the cost of rent, renters—who often have lower incomes than homeowners—suffer.

Participants spoke to the need for organizations that train AI models to be held accountable for the governance and consequences of those models, in the same way that vehicle manufacturers are held responsible for any vehicle defects that threaten driver safety.

Participants explored the possibility of individualized data ownership, where individuals would own the rights to their own data and companies would need to be granted the right to access said data. This runs contrary to the current state of data ownership, where companies own individuals' data and monetize it, often without express consent.

Participants expressed a hope for AI systems to build a better world. Taiwan is an example of a democracy that has leveraged technology to improve quality of life and build large-scale consensus among groups of people. AI can be used to keep legislative policies accountable, helping with research that directly links outcomes to said policies. AI can also be used to further scientific fields, or connect diverse peoples—for example, aiding with translation across countries and cultures. Participants also speculated on the potential for AI to encourage in-person community gatherings, as interactions there cannot be falsified.

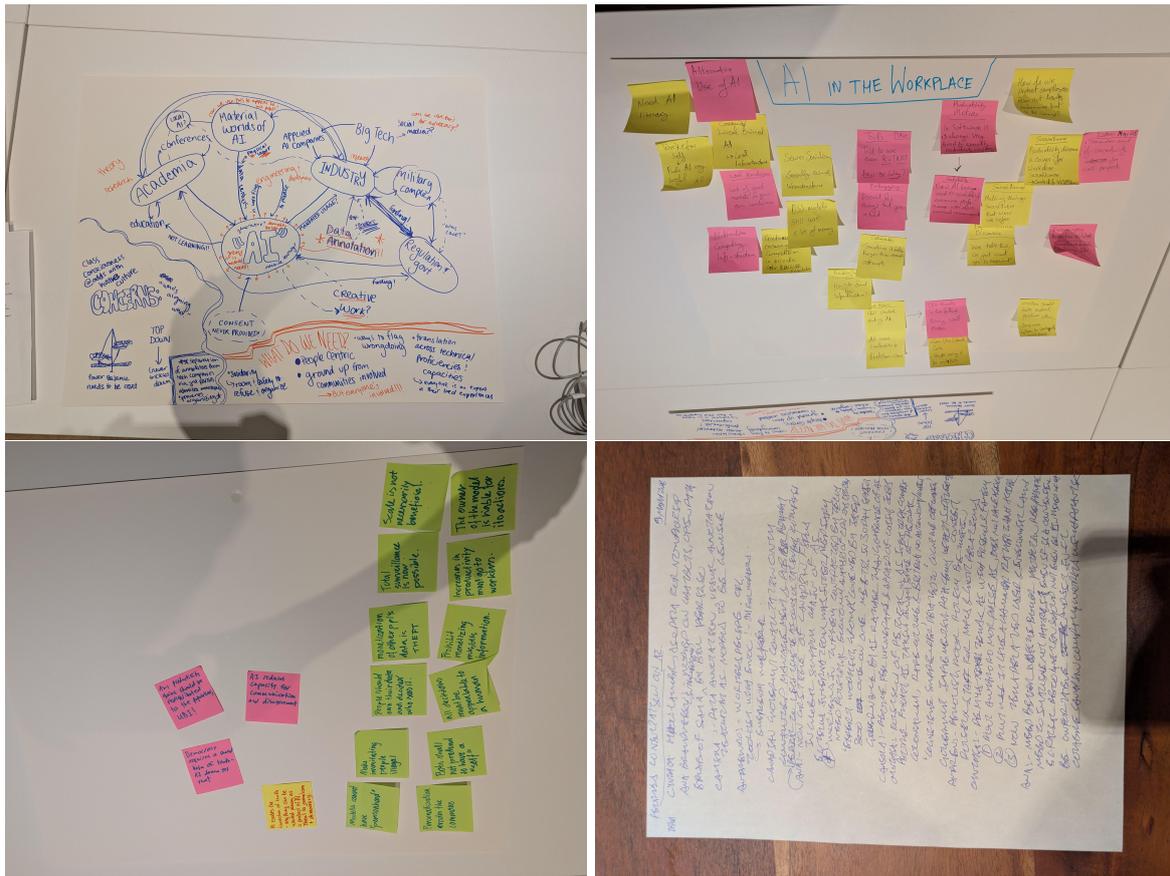


Figure 2: Participants utilized different tools for note-taking including on chart papers, sticky notes, and their laptop computers.

8 What can the people do: Building up collective power

We asked the participants to grapple with how to build collective power to enact the group's collective vision.

- **Discuss with others:** People feel powerless with the way Canada has rolled out their National AI Strategy. There is power in just discussing with each other.
- **Leverage expertise as workers:** When the National AI Strategy overwhelmingly takes the perspective of industry, it is important to call out that it only listens to the C-suite. It did not seek input from workers. Many workers are involved with producing and deploying much of the technology in the National AI Strategy that can also be leveraged. Their skills can be used to produce and deploy technology, including AI technology that is open source.
- **Make legible the costs of deploying AI:** AI relies on a lot of physical infrastructure such as datacentres that impose real material costs including environmental and financial costs to communities. There is an opportunity to engage the public by educating them on how deploying AI at scale can directly lead to tangible, negative outcomes such as increases in their energy bills.
- **Mobilize neighbours to petition legislators:** Technology deployed by private organizations should be

regulated by legislators to protect the public interest.

- **Share perspective with media:** Much reporting on AI overindexes on views that reinforce narratives of inevitability, whether it is in favour of accelerating AI's deployment or being critical of AI. It is important to share perspectives with media that refuse the politics of inevitability.
- **Organize the workplace:** There are many ways in which the C-suite of industry is deploying AI in a manner that undermines working conditions. Organizing fellow workers, including unionizing can be one vehicle to build collective power.

9 The People's demands to the government of Canada

We asked the participants to grapple with what their demands are for how the Government of Canada can reconsider their National AI Strategy.

- **Co-develop regulations with communities:** Currently, AI is developed and concentrated among a small number of market players that are built for a global optimum at the expense of optimizing for local community needs. There is an opportunity to have more local community input to shape rules on how this technology is produced and deployed.
- **Develop AI as publicly-owned infrastructure:** Much in the way that utilities are often publicly-owned, we can institutionally entrench AI as a public good by having publicly-owned AI that is democratically controlled.
- **Ban AI from being deployed for surveillance:** There are serious concerns with how AI can be used to surveil workers in the workplace and across society in general. With privacy being critical, the people demand that AI not be used for surveillance purposes.
- **Stronger labour protections for workers:** There are many workers who will be impacted by this technology. The people believe that any claims of productivity gains will accrue to investors at the expense of workers. The people support the idea of a bill of rights for specific workers involved in the production of AI, such as data workers. The people also support collective bargaining agreements that would govern the use of AI in the workplace.
- **Regulatory bodies must protect themselves from regulatory capture by big tech:** With the far-reaching impacts AI has had, the people demand that AI be regulated. Such demands include: monitoring how AI is deployed, requiring safety audits of AI models, and co-developing a bill of AI safety directly with communities. It is critical that workers and representatives from the community be directly involved in the governance of these bodies, and that they do not become captured by industry.
- **Enforce existing laws:** There are many existing laws that are not being enforced that enable the proliferation of AI, such as privacy legislation, intellectual property legislation and competition legislation. The people demand that these existing laws be enforced.

Appendices

A Territorial and technological acknowledgment

We welcome everyone joining us today, in-person or virtually using Jitsi to connect and engage. As we gather today to talk about AI, and its impact on our past and our futures, let us recognize that these technologies did not emerge out of the ether, but were built by institutions and individuals and using infrastructure and materials physically located on multiple territories around the world that is home to often-marginalised Indigenous peoples. Let us recognize that the production of these technologies depend on the extraction of Indigenous culture, language, and artwork in the form of data for model training. These technologies, in deployment, influence daily whose perspectives are privileged and whose voices are erased, which in turn influence the stories we tell of ourselves and of our land, and decide our history that remains in collective memory and what is forgotten. Let us recognize that these technologies connect us in new ways and at the same time replicate and entrench the inequities and divisions from the real world into our digital realities and alienate us from the aims of restitution, justice, and reparation for Indigenous and other marginalised peoples. So, let our conversations today be grounded in the acknowledgment of the relationship between technology and the peoples and the lands we occupy. Let us recognize that Indigenous communities are at the fore-front of the global discourse on AI and data governance (e.g., the Te Kāhui Raraunga Māori data governance model) and in the resistance against datacentres that threaten sacred lands, water resources, traditional knowledge and treaty rights. And let us both celebrate new knowledge and simultaneously acknowledge all the Indigenous knowledge that has been undervalued, and work towards the goal of a just and equitable future.

I want to recognize that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships with the territory upon which we are gathered today. The area known as Tkaronto has been care-taken by the Anishinabek Nation, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Huron-Wendat peoples. It is now home to many First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities. I acknowledge the current treaty holders, the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. This territory is subject of the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region.

We welcome those who are joining us virtually to simultaneously acknowledge their own physical location and share their respective land acknowledgment, using tools like <https://native-land.ca>.