

BASEL, SWITZERLAND • 25-28 AUGUST 2026



Basel High-Level Week 2026 **PROGRAMME**

MEA INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES



University
of Basel
Centre for
African Studies



MEA INSTITUTE FOR
STRATEGIC STUDIES

ABOUT US

A platform for ideas, collaboration, and engagement.

WHO WE ARE

The MEA Institute for Strategic Studies is an independent, youth-led think tank advancing informed policymaking, inclusive dialogue, and youth leadership across the Middle East and Africa. As the first think tank of its kind, we bridge the gap between scholarship and policy, translating complex regional dynamics into actionable insights for decision-makers worldwide.

OUR MISSION

Amplify. Bridge. Impact.

We amplify the voices of emerging leaders across the Middle East and Africa, foster unity in diversity, and deliver evidence-based analysis that informs policy and drives meaningful change.

OUR VISION

Empower. Transform. Innovate.

We envision a Middle East and Africa that shapes the 21st century through intergenerational dialogue, breaking silos, empowering diverse voices, and building sustainable policy frameworks for generations to come.

OUR IMPACT

- 6 Policy Centres · 2 Regional Programmes · 60+ Research Network worldwide
- High-level dialogues at the UN (Geneva & New York) and UNESCO (Paris)
- Flagship conferences and events gathering 25+ international delegations
- Publications reaching policymakers across MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa, Europe & North America.

"What we set out to build was not another think tank, but a platform: a place for the Middle East and Africa to think about themselves, in their own voice."

Abdel-Illah Boukhezer,
Founder & President

ABOUT THE EVENT

Basel, Switzerland · 25–28 August 2026

AFRICA'S TRANSFORMATION CROSSROADS;

YOUTH AS POLICY DRIVERS

The MEA Institute for Strategic Studies invites emerging leaders, policymakers, academics, and practitioners to Basel for a high-level week of dialogue, research, and strategic engagement. Organised in partnership with leading academic institutions, this multi-day convening places Africa at the centre of global policy conversations: exploring how African perspectives are actively shaping the transformations of our time.

Across a dynamic programme of forums, dialogue sessions, and side events, participants will engage with critical questions at the intersection of policy, innovation, and society, with youth not as symbolic additions, but as structural partners in governance.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

25 August 2026

Emerging Leaders Forum

A dedicated space for the next generation of policymakers, researchers, and changemakers, centring youth voices across four thematic pillars at the heart of global policy conversations.

26–28 August 2026

SGAS/SSEA & VAD Conference

A joint biennial conference at the University of Basel bringing together scholars from Europe, Africa, and beyond under the theme "African Perspectives on Global Transformations".

Throughout the Week

MEA Institute Dialogue Sessions

Dedicated sessions creating direct engagement between policymakers, researchers, and emerging leaders across sectors, translating complex ideas into actionable and meaningful policy conversations.

50+

Emerging Leaders

Youth voices
shaping policy
outcomes

120

Speakers

AI & Governance · Resources ·
Policy · Trade

4

Days of Programming

Forums, dialogues,
side events, and
networking

Attendees from
25+ countries

700+

Participants throughout the week

Leaders, academics, and practitioners
convening in Basel

86+

Panels and Side Events

Across the High-
level dialogues

PROGRAMME

TUESDAY, 25 AUGUST 2026

9:00 - 10:00

Registration and Welcome Coffee – Arrival, informal networking. MEA team available for introductions.

10:00 - 10:15

Opening Session - Plenary

Africa's Transformation Crossroads; Youth as Policy Drivers

10:15 - 11:00

High-Level Keynote

Youth, Sovereignty, and the Architecture of Global Trade: Africa's Emerging Voice in Multilateral Governance

Keynote Address with Moderated Q&A

11:00 - 11:25

Lightning Panel

Extraction or Transformation? Critical Minerals, Gulf Capital, and Africa's Sovereign Stake in the Energy Transition

11:25 - 12:15

Ambassadorial Panel

The Decade Begins: Reparatory Justice, Institutional Power, and the Implementation Politics of the UNGA Slave Trade Resolution

Panel with Moderated Q&A

12:15 - 13:45

Networking Break and Lunch

13:45 - 14:30

Afternoon Panel

Building or Being Built? Young Africans on Technology, AI, and Who Controls the Digital Future

Panel with Moderated Q&A

14:30 - 15:00

Networking Break

15:00 - 16:30

Policy Workshop - World Cafe

Interactive Workshop - Registration Required,

16:30 - 17:30

Workshop - Policy Synthesis and Pledge Adoption

Plenary Synthesis Session

18:00 - 19:00

MEA Talks: Career in Policy

Informal Evening Session

SESSIONS OUTLINE

HIGH-LEVEL KEYNOTE

Youth, Sovereignty, and the Architecture of Global Trade: Africa's Emerging Voice in Multilateral Governance

Africa holds over 60% of its population under 25, yet multilateral trade institutions remain calibrated to senior incumbents. This keynote examines how a new generation of African trade professionals, researchers, and civic actors is reshaping the substance and strategy of Africa's multilateral positions. Drawing on the AfCFTA framework and Agenda 2063, it interrogates institutional and epistemic barriers to youth co-leadership in trade policy, and asks what equitable participation in multilateral governance requires in structural terms.

LIGHTNING PANEL

Extraction or Transformation? Critical Minerals, Gulf Capital, and Africa's Sovereign Stake in the Energy Transition

Africa holds approximately 30% of global critical mineral reserves, yet the terms of benefit remain contested. This panel examines Gulf and Middle Eastern sovereign capital as an emerging pole in African resource politics, asking whether current partnership frameworks constitute a structural departure from historical extraction or a geographic rebranding of the same logic. The session centres conditionality, beneficiation requirements, and the governance architecture needed to protect African sovereign interests in the energy transition economy.

AMBASSADORIAL PANEL

The Decade Begins: Reparatory Justice, Institutional Power, and the Implementation Politics of the UNGA Slave Trade Resolution

The 25 March 2026 UNGA resolution on the transatlantic slave trade marks an opening, not a conclusion. This session convenes senior African diplomatic voices to examine the implementation architecture required: cultural property restitution, and AU institutional machinery for the Decade for Reparations 2026-2036. It interrogates what the shift from declaratory multilateralism to enforceable obligation requires in legal, financial, and institutional terms.

SESSIONS OUTLINE

AFTERNOON PANEL

Building or Being Built? Young Africans on Technology, AI, and Who Controls the Digital Future

Africa holds approximately 1% of global compute capacity and remains predominantly positioned as a site of data extraction. This panel centres young African technologists and policy professionals contesting these structural conditions, drawing on the AU Continental AI Strategy and the April 2026 AU Peace and Security Council engagement with AI governance. The discussion interrogates compute infrastructure, data sovereignty, AI supply chain labour conditions, and the capital structures shaping African technological agency.

MEA TALKS: CAREER IN POLICY

Evening Session

Three practitioners at distinct career stages share reflections on non-linear trajectories into policy work, addressing institutional entry points, mentorship structures, and practical professional development. Designed for student and emerging-professional audiences, the session closes the Forum's formal day programme and bridges into the conference opening on Wednesday.



PROGRAMME

WEDNESDAY, 26 AUGUST 2026

12:45 - 13:45

MEA Policy Dialogue

The \$2.8 Trillion Question: Understanding the New Middle East-Africa Capital Map

17:30 - 20:00

Networking Session

THURSDAY, 27 AUGUST 2026

12:45 - 13:45

MEA Policy Dialogue

Bandwidth Was Not Enough: An Intergenerational Dialogue on Compute, Control, and African Technological Self-Determination

FRIDAY, 28 AUGUST 2026

08:00 - 09:00

Breakfast Briefing

Sustaining Youth-Led Policy Innovation

12:45 - 13:45

MEA Policy Dialogue

Who Owes What to Whom? After the Resolution: Youth, Reparations, and the Architecture of Restitution

17:30 - 18:00

Closing Synthesis Session

SESSIONS OUTLINE

#1 MEA POLICY DIALOGUE

The \$2.8 Trillion Question: Understanding the New Middle East-Africa Capital Map

Building on Tuesday's Lightning Panel, this dialogue moves from who is investing to how the money actually moves. The session interrogates the financial architecture of Middle East-Africa capital flows - sovereign debt restructuring, blended finance vehicles, green bonds - asking whether current deal structures serve African developmental and fiscal interests or update historical extraction patterns with new instruments. No opening statements; moderator-led with direct questions throughout.

#2 MEA POLICY DIALOGUE

Bandwidth Was Not Enough: An Intergenerational Dialogue on Compute, Control, and African Technological Self-Determination

An intergenerational dialogue pairing a senior architect of Africa's digital infrastructure with a young AI policy professional. The conversation asks whether the structural dependency patterns of Africa's broadband era are repeating in the AI era, stress-testing the AU Continental AI Strategy against the historical record of telecommunications governance. The dialogue interrogates what each generation knows that the other cannot afford to ignore, and what genuine technological sovereignty would require.

#3 MEA POLICY DIALOGUE

Who Owes What to Whom? After the Resolution: Youth, Reparations, and the Architecture of Restitution

The 25 March 2026 UNGA resolution on the transatlantic slave trade marks an opening, not a conclusion. This session convenes senior African diplomatic voices to examine the implementation architecture required: cultural property restitution, and AU institutional machinery for the Decade for Reparations 2026-2036. It interrogates what the shift from declaratory multilateralism to enforceable obligation requires in legal, financial, and institutional terms.



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