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JUDGEMENT 1 OF 7

HOW SURE WE ARE: OBSERVED

The UN agreed words, while the money was raised elsewhere

IN BRIEF

- During the week of speeches in New York, the two agreements that UN members negotiated together either carried no money or failed.
- The largest sum of the week, about \$3 billion for Ebola, was raised at a meeting called by the United States outside the World Health Organization (WHO).

Inside the UN General Assembly, governments adopted a declaration on rising seas that commits no money, and could not agree one on pandemics. Outside it, a group led by the United States raised the biggest sum of the week. The United States left WHO in January 2026, yet it now steers much of the world's emergency health money. For Africa, this means the rules that come with money are now written where African votes count least.

The reasoning

On 24 September the General Assembly adopted a declaration on rising sea levels without a vote. It calls for early warning and better preparation, and it commits no money. About 770 million people live less than five metres above the high-tide line. The next day, governments could not agree a declaration on preventing pandemics. The United States said it could not support the full text, and European governments raised objections. The text is expected to go to a vote before the Assembly's session ends in December. Until then, the one health text of the week that African governments backed has no force.

The money moved elsewhere. On 23 September a meeting of the Group of 20 (G20) large economies and others, called by the United States, raised \$2.997 billion to fight Ebola in the

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The United States gave \$887 million, the European Union \$568 million and the World Bank \$433 million. African governments together gave \$110 million, less than 4% of the total. On the same day, the UN Climate Summit launched a plan for electricity grids and a support scheme for critical minerals in five African countries. Neither came with money. The UN has also proposed a Global Fund for artificial intelligence (AI), with a target of about \$3 billion over two to four years. No government has pledged to it yet.

Where money moves matters, because the conditions travel with it. All 193 UN members negotiate a declaration together. A coalition fund or a deal between two governments is written by whoever pays, and each African government signs alone. With 54 votes in the Assembly, Africa has the most influence in the first setting and the least in the second. In 2026, more of the money moved into the second.

The evidence

- World Meteorological Organization (WMO): the sea-level declaration was adopted without a vote on 24 September, with no money attached [Source](#)
- Health Policy Watch: the pandemic declaration was not agreed on 25 September and heads to a vote in December [Source](#)
- Africa CDC: a US-led meeting raised \$2.997 billion for Ebola on 23 September, of which African governments gave \$110 million [Source](#)
- UN: no pledges have been announced to the proposed Global Fund for AI [Source](#)

The strongest argument against

Declarations set the terms that money follows later. The UN's development goals of 2015 shaped a decade of national budgets before anyone had costed them. The Assembly gives Africa a voice in writing rules, which it lacks in one-to-one deals. Judging the Assembly by the money pledged on the day may miss what it is for.

Sector briefings behind this judgement

Sector · Strong inference

Health

Health money for Africa now comes through one-to-one deals, and patients' data is part of the price.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Strong inference

Climate and energy

Money to help Africa cope with climate change is shrinking, while Africa sells its minerals and carbon credits on terms it has not yet set.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Strong inference

AI and technology

The UN has set up new bodies on artificial intelligence and funded none of them, while Africa's real limits are electricity and buyers who will commit to paying.

[Open the briefing](#)

Sector · Observed

The UN and diplomacy

The UN is shrinking because its largest members do not pay, and Africa entered the one big decision of the year, the choice of the next Secretary-General, divided and with its own candidates trailing.

[Open the briefing](#)

Recommended moves

30 DAYS · BY 28 OCTOBER 2026

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African set of rules on health data for health funding deals

Leads: Africa CDC with the African Union Commission; Kenya as the first country to use the rules

1 YEAR · BY 3 MAY 2027 DIALOGUE

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African position on how the UN's AI fund is run

Leads: The AU Commission, with Gabon and Senegal as the first countries and the African Group in New York

1 YEAR · BY FEBRUARY 2027

CONTINENTAL

Agree one African standard for payment, review and exit terms in aid deals

Leads: The AU Commission with Africa
CDC and African finance ministers;
Zambia as the first country to use the
standard

Words used on this page

World Health Organization (WHO)

The UN's health agency. It sets health standards and coordinates responses to outbreaks. The United States left it in January 2026. [Health briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: who.int](#)

UN General Assembly

The meeting of all 193 UN member states, each with one vote. It meets every year from September. It can make statements, elect members of other bodies and approve the UN budget, but most of what it says does not bind governments. [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)

The G20

A group of 19 large economies plus the European Union and the African Union, whose leaders meet once a year. South Africa held the chair in 2025, and the United States holds it in 2026. [Development cooperation briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)

Africa's second-largest country by area, in central Africa. Its east has seen armed conflict for three decades, and it holds much of the world's cobalt. [Security and conflict briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

European Union (EU)

A union of 27 European countries with shared laws, a single market and a large aid budget. [Glossary](#)

Critical minerals and processing

Minerals such as lithium, cobalt and copper needed for batteries and clean energy. Selling ore or concentrate earns far less than processing it at home into metals or chemicals. [Our recommendation on this](#) · [Climate and energy briefing](#) · [Glossary](#)

The Global Fund

An international fund that pays for HIV, tuberculosis and malaria programmes. It raises money from governments and private donors every three years. [Health briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: theglobalfund.org](#)

WMO

The World Meteorological Organization, the UN's agency for weather, climate and water. It coordinates forecasts and early warnings. [Food and agriculture briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: wmo.int](#)

Africa CDC

The African Union's public health agency, based in Addis Ababa. It coordinates disease control across the continent. [Health briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: africacdc.org](#)

UN AI panel and Global Dialogue

Two UN processes on AI agreed in 2025: a scientific panel that reports on AI's risks and uses, and a yearly meeting of governments on how to govern it. A proposed UN fund would pay for AI skills in poorer countries. [AI and technology briefing](#) · [Glossary](#) · [Source: un.org](#)