

September 4, 2026

United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability
AEON Environmental Foundation

Global Youth MIDORI platform 2026 Announces Winners of the Speech Contest

From 4 to 7 August, UNU-IAS and the AEON Environmental Foundation held the third international training session as part of the Global Youth MIDORI platform (GYM) 2026, a capacity development programme for youth, selecting three award winners.

Awardees of the GYM Third International Joint Training Program Speech Contest

1. Best Performance Award

Hiroto Maekawa	University of Toronto (Canada)
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2. Runner Up

Carlos Manuel Eusoya	University of the Philippines Manila (Philippines)
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3. Third Place

Zannirah Rehman	Lahore University of Management Sciences (Pakistan)
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GYM aims to strengthen the capacity of youth to address global sustainability challenges by enhancing their scientific knowledge and understanding of international policy processes related to biodiversity conservation and climate change, while developing the skills needed for meaningful youth participation. Through its international training session, GYM helps participants to strengthen their expertise and build networks with other youth. GYM also serves as a platform for long-term learning and networking, providing opportunities for youth to organize and participate in various outreach activities.

The 2026 GYM international training session engaged 17 university students from 12 countries, selected from a total of 654 applicants from 96 countries and regions. Through lectures by experts and discussions among participants from different regions facing diverse environmental challenges, they deepened their understanding of global issues.

A speech contest selected 3 outstanding participants, and the 3 winners of the contest attended the 9th MIDORI Prize for Biodiversity Award Ceremony and Laureates Forum organized by the AEON Environmental Foundation. They engaged in various activities including exchange sessions with MIDORI Prize Laureates and discussions with UNU-IAS researchers, as well as visits to recycling facilities at AEON MALL Makuhari New City and a recycling factory in Ibaraki to learn about circular economy initiatives in Japan.

UNU-IAS and the AEON Environmental Foundation will continue to support youth around the world

and foster the next generation of environmental leaders to take action on global challenges.

AEON MALL Makuhari New City	The 9th MIDORI prize for biodiversity Award Ceremony and Laureates Forum	International Training at UNU-IAS
		

Background

GYM was launched in 2024 to enhance the capacity of youth to develop solutions for global challenges, establishing a platform for youth. This programme consists of (i) international training with a speech contest, (ii) participation in international conferences for selected winners of the speech contests, and (iii) activities to develop a platform for youth.

The 2nd GYM International Training, held in 2025, brought together 15 undergraduate students from 8 countries. The top 2 awardees of the 2025 GYM speech contest were invited to participate in the 2025 UN Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP30) in Belem, Brazil as part of the UNU delegation, where they contributed to activities including participation in side events and engaging in discussions with youth from various countries and regions, government officials and environmental experts. In addition, GYM participants continue to take part in various activities organized by UNU-IAS beyond training sessions, engaging in outreach and awareness-raising activities.

Further details about GYM 2025 activities are available at the following links:

1. Youth and Researchers Discuss Cross-Cutting Solutions at COP30

<https://unu.edu/ias/news/youth-and-researchers-discuss-cross-cutting-solutions-cop30>

2. COP30 Event Explores Youth-led Urban Futures

<https://unu.edu/ias/news/cop30-event-explores-youth-led-urban-futures>

AEON Environmental Foundation

AEON Environmental Foundation was established in 1990 by Takuya Okada (Honorary Chairman and Advisor, AEON Co., Ltd.) as Japan's first corporate foundation dedicated to global environmental issues. The foundation was created based on AEON's fundamental philosophy: "Pursuing peace, respecting humanity, and contributing to local communities, always with the customer's point of view as its core."

Since its establishment, the foundation has worked with a wide range of stakeholders and carried out activities centered on four core areas: tree planting, grants, environmental education and collaborative research, and awards. The foundation is also currently engaged in new *satoyama*



initiatives aimed at realizing sustainable local communities.

United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS)

UNU-IAS was established in 2014 as an institute of the United Nations University (UNU), whose mission is to contribute to solving urgent global challenges of concern to the United Nations and its Member States. Based in Tokyo, UNU-IAS promotes research in four areas: Governance for Climate Change and Sustainable Development, Biodiversity and Society, Water and Resource Management, and Innovation and Education. It also offers master's and doctoral degree programmes, a range of innovative short courses and postdoctoral fellowships.

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