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Multilateral Public Diplomacy at Expo 2025

Osaka ^[1]

Below is the fourth installment in a series documenting Expo 2025 by César Corona, CEO of [ExpoMuseum.com](https://www.expomuseum.com), an organization devoted to documenting World Expos and collaborating with partners and press to share knowledge about them. UN Pavilion/Rocky. For more of his work—including [part one](#), [part two](#), and [part three](#) of this series—visit his [author page](#). Images credit: © 2025 UN Pavilion/Rocky.

Expos often serve as theaters of national self-presentation, where participation is read largely through the lens of the nation-state. Country pavilions typically tell stories of heritage, innovation, and aspiration through identifiable national frameworks. Official participation is also organized primarily around sovereign countries, reinforcing the state-centered character of these mega-events.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations (UN) at Expo 2025 Osaka faced a complex public diplomacy challenge. The UN had to speak credibly on behalf of all member countries, communicate coherently while representing multiple national identities, and present dozens of specialized agencies working across areas ranging from global health and civil aviation to atomic energy and humanitarian relief, without overwhelming visitors.



This makes the UN Pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka an instructive case for public diplomacy. Unlike national pavilions, which can rely on familiar symbols and narratives, the UN had to make multilateralism understandable, relatable, and relevant to everyday experience. The Pavilion sought to explain a system designed to benefit populations worldwide in different ways, often invisibly, across borders, cultures, and generations.

The Pavilion's strategy was informed by empirical evidence. Surveys suggested relatively low favorability toward the UN in Japan, while support for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was overwhelmingly positive. Rather than leading with institutional structures, the Pavilion used the SDGs as its entry point. Goals that were already familiar and trusted became the bridge back to the UN system, framing multilateralism as something connected to everyday life.

UN Assistant Secretary-General Maher Nasser served as Commissioner-General for the UN's participation, providing full-time, on-site direction throughout the Expo. His presence was not merely ceremonial. He was visibly active in Pavilion programming, public events, and scholarly exchanges across the site, offering a steady point of coordination across numerous UN entities and giving a complex institutional presence a human face.

The Pavilion guided visitors through a deliberate narrative arc. It began with the UN's role in shaping international norms, moved to present-day impacts, and concluded with a future-oriented call to action. This structure was important because media coverage of the UN frequently emphasizes moments of gridlock and conflict, which can overshadow its day-to-day operational work. The Pavilion instead highlighted how multilateral cooperation functions and why it matters in ordinary life. The final section, focused on future action, emerged as the most popular part of the experience.

Between April 13 and October 13, 2025, the UN Pavilion received more than 406,000 visits, averaging over 2,200 per day. Visitors came from 122 nationalities, but nearly 90 percent were Japanese. This reflects a broader Expo pattern, in which roughly 95 percent of visitors are local or national residents, and helps explain why the Pavilion was designed primarily for the host-country public.

"Even when identities, priorities, and messages are multiple and complex, it is possible to bring them together in a narrative that is relatable, easy to understand, and memorable."

Monitoring and evaluation were integrated into the experience itself. Visitors were invited to complete a short digital survey and, in exchange, could engage with *gacha* machines (a type of vending machine, commonly found in Japan, that dispenses a randomized capsule item in exchange for a small payment or action), a culturally familiar and playful mechanism. More than 155,000 surveys were completed, representing a 38 percent participation rate. The results indicate strong positive outcomes in satisfaction, perception, and reported motivation. The *gacha* capsules were reused, reflecting a commitment to practical sustainability.



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Many visitors expressed surprise at the breadth of UN activities and described relief at encountering an institution that felt closer to daily life than expected. Rather than seeking admiration, the Pavilion encouraged understanding of the UN's relevance, its role, and the idea of shared responsibility.

The broader lesson extends beyond Osaka. Multilateral organizations face a communicative task that differs fundamentally from the nation-state model that dominates Expo participation. They cannot rely on a singular identity alone. They must actively construct a coherent narrative across diverse mandates and institutional voices, coordinate across priorities, and evaluate impact rigorously enough to learn and adapt.



The UN case also offers an important lesson for participating countries. Even when identities,

priorities, and messages are multiple and complex, it is possible to bring them together in a narrative that is relatable, easy to understand, and memorable. It also shows that monitoring and evaluation need not be detached or purely technical. When embedded creatively into the visitor experience, they can become both effective and engaging.

For public diplomacy specialists, the UN Pavilion offers a richer understanding of what Expos can do. These events are not only platforms for national projection. At their best, they show how complex messaging can be made legible and meaningful to the public, and how monitoring and evaluation can be embedded creatively into the visitor experience. In that sense, the UN Pavilion's greatest achievement may have been this: it made multilateralism visible, intelligible, and publicly meaningful without diluting its complexity.
