

Sign-on Letter to ask World Health Organization Executive Board members to support the resolution on a "Global Framework on Essential Health Research and Development" proposed by the Republic of Kenya at the January 2006 meeting.

January 25th, 2006

Open Letter to the WHO Executive Board

Dear Members of the WHO Executive Board:

As scientists, many of whom work in fields connected with biomedicine, we are writing to express our support for the resolution submitted by the Republic of Kenya at the 117th meeting of the WHO Executive Board on January 23rd 2006.

Although we have very varied scientific backgrounds, from basic research to specific clinical research, we are all deeply concerned with deficiencies in the way that biomedical research science is supported and translated into treatments that improve health outcomes around the world. In the research setting we see many possibilities to develop drugs to treat neglected diseases, but a lack of sustainable support for the R&D process. In the clinical setting we see the problem of affordable drugs to a greater or lesser extent in health care systems in all countries.

At a time of huge progress in basic research science and more money being spent on biomedical R&D than ever, we are deeply concerned about the ability of existing mechanisms to translate this into a global improvement in public health. We have all felt the impact and promise of the free availability of genome sequence data, notably from the human genome project. At the same time we see research activities increasingly complicated by legal restrictions, such as intellectual property rights, which can interfere with free data exchange and can limit biomedical research progress. We do not see a good balance between medical need and resource allocation in the existing system to support R&D. For example, there is less focus on neglected diseases, vaccines or replacement antibiotics than their potential impact on global health outcomes would justify.

The resolution appears to address all of these issues in a balanced way. For example, it does not seek to eliminate the use of patents to incentivise commercial innovation, but instead allows other incentive systems to be used along side and considered under trade rules. It also proposes long term solutions to sustainable funding, prioritisation and access issues.

We call upon the Executive Board to support this important and timely resolution.

Sincerely,

Sir John Sulston FRS, 2002 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine, Former Director of the Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge, UK.

Dr. Tim Hubbard, Head of Human Genome Analysis, Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge, UK.

Rich Roberts, 1993 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine, Chief Scientific Officer, New England Biolabs, USA.

Sir Paul Nurse FRS, 2001 Nobel Laureate in Physiology or Medicine, President of the Rockefeller University, New York, USA.

Professor Fotis Kafatos, Former Director of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory, Chair of European Research Council to be launched in 2006, Greece.

Professor Mary Osborn, President of the International Union of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Max Planck Institute for Biophysical Chemistry, Goettingen, Germany.

Professor Taina Pihlajaniemi, Scientific Director of Biocenter Oulu, Finland.

Professor Dino Moras, Directeur du Laboratoire de Biologie et de Genomique Structurales, France.

Professor Glauco Tocchini-Valentini, Director, CNR-IBC. Monterotondo, Italy.

Professor Dimitrios Thanos, Director, Institute of Molecular Biology & Genetics, Biomedical Sciences Research Center "Alexander Fleming", Greece.

Professor Gertjan van Ommen, Head, Department of Human Genetics, Center for Human and Clinical Genetics, Director, Center for Medical Systems Biology, Leiden University Medical Center, The Netherlands.

Professor Jeremy Farrar, Director of the Oxford University Clinical Research Unit, Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

Professor Martin Bobrow, FRS, University of Cambridge, Department of Medical Genetics, UK.

Professor Janet Thornton CBE FRS, Director European Bioinformatics Institute, UK.

Professor Gordon Dougan, Member of the Board of Management, The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute, Cambridge, UK.

Professor Michael Ashburner, FRS, Professor of Biology, University of Cambridge, England.

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Professor Peter G Smith, Professor of Tropical Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK.

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Professor Simon Cousens, Professor of Epidemiology and Medical Statistics, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK.

Professor Chris Newbold, Weatherall Institute of Molecular Medicine, University of Oxford, UK.

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Professor Julian Peto, Cancer Research UK, Chair of Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK.

Professor Andrew Tait, Wellcome Centre for Molecular Parasitology, Glasgow, UK.

Professor Sir Kenneth Calman, past Chairman of the WHO Executive Board, University of Durham, UK.

Professor John Boothroyd, Professor of Microbiology and Immunology, Stanford University School of Medicine, USA.

Margarita Rais Mahindi, Research engineer, Karolinska Institute, Dept. Laboratory Medicine/Div. Clinical Pharmacology, Karolinska University Hospital, Sweden.

Professor Chris Curtis, Professor of Medical Entomology at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK.

Dr. Ouedraogo Alphonse, Burkina Faso.

Dr. Cindy Korir, Project Coordinator, Malaria Foundation International, Research Associate, Emory University Vaccine and Research Center, Atlanta, USA.

Professor Betty Kirkwood, Professor of Epidemiology & International Health, Nutrition & Public Health Intervention Research Unit, Department of Epidemiology & Population Health, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, UK.

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Dr. Jean-Bosco Ouedraogo, Directeur de Recherche, IRSS, Burkina Faso.

Dr. Julio A. Urbina, Head, Biological Chemistry Laboratory, Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research, Caracas, Venezuela.

Dr. Drabo Koine Maxime, IRSS-DRO, Burkina Faso.

Professor Solomon R Benatar, Professor of Medicine, University of Cape Town, South Africa, Visiting Professor in Medicine & Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto, Canada.

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Dr. John Michael Ong'echa, Research Scientist, Kenya.

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Sir Cyril Chantler, Medical Director of Well Child Medical Research Fund, former Dean of the Guy's, King's and St Thomas' Medical and Dental Schools and former Pro-Vice Chancellor, University of London (1997-2000), UK.

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