



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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## **ICSU TAKES ACTION AGAINST RESTRICTIONS TO 'FREEDOM IN THE CONDUCT OF SCIENCE'**

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – In response to various social and political forces—in both developed and developing nations—that pose potential threats to the fundamental principle of universal freedom in the conduct of science, the International Council for Science (ICSU) will undertake a comprehensive review of the current global situation.

ICSU will examine three specific aspects of this issue: existing and emerging threats to freedom; the scope of the actual and potential problems worldwide; and, recommendations for responding to the needs of individual scientists facing particular limitations or restrictions and identifying parallel responsibilities.

“During the public debate that erupted in the UK regarding scientific collaboration with Israeli scholars (April 2002), ICSU issued a statement\* reaffirming our commitment to the principle of universal freedom,” says Dr. James Dooge, former Chair of ICSU’s Standing Committee on Freedom in the Conduct of Science (SCFCS). “However, in its report to ICSU’s General Assembly, the SCFCS clearly outlined many other pressing concerns.”

For example, subsequent to the September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York, the United States is implementing security measures that make it more difficult for scientists from particular nations to receive travel visas for scientific conferences in a timely manner. ICSU recommends that such issues be proactively addressed. In fact, on 27 September 2002, then President Dr. Hiroyuki Yoshikawa wrote a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell to raise ICSU’s concerns and initiate dialogue on achieving mutually agreeable arrangements.

At the same time, ICSU is committed to ensuring that individual scientists recognize the responsibilities associated with the rights outlined in the principle of Freedom in the

Conduct of Science. Thus, they will undertake efforts to reinforce the need for scientists and conference organizers to provide adequate information and allow sufficient time for the processing of visa applications, etc.

ICSU's statement on freedom in the conduct of science covers three critical areas: freedom to pursue science and to publish the results; freedom to communicate amongst scientists and to disseminate scientific information; and freedom of movement of scientific materials.

The SCFCS believes strongly that the global questions currently on the scientific agenda will require increased multidisciplinary and international collaboration. It also believes that restrictions such as those described above will have a negative impact on the overall value of science, both nationally and internationally.

“We want to look at these questions from all sides, and find ways to work with governments and policy makers to ensure the universal rights of scientists remain intact,” says Dr. Peter Warren, Chair of the SCFCS. “This is critical to ICSU's mission of pursuing science for society on a global scale.”

\* Statement attached. Also available at [www.icsu.org/release\\_freedom](http://www.icsu.org/release_freedom)

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Founded in 1931, the International Council for Science (ICSU) is a non-governmental organisation representing a global membership that includes both national scientific academies (101 members) and international scientific unions (27 members). Drawing on this wide spectrum of expertise, ICSU addresses major international, interdisciplinary issues typically beyond the scope of individual organisations. The Council also builds on this vast knowledge by initiating, designing and coordinating multidisciplinary research programmes, particularly in the area of global environmental change.

ICSU acts as a focal point for the exchange of ideas, the communication of scientific information, and the development of scientific standards and networks. The Council addresses important matters of concern to scientists, such as education and capacity building for science, access to scientific data and information, science in developing countries, and freedom in the conduct of science. By harnessing the power of a network that connects hundreds of thousands of scientists around the world, ICSU is actively *strengthening international science for the benefit of society*.

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## **ISRAELI SCHOLARS: STATEMENT BY ICSU/SCFCS**

Since its inception in 1931, the International Council for Science (ICSU) has affirmed and vigorously upheld the principle of universality of science based on the human right of scientists throughout the world to participate in scientific activity without any discrimination on the grounds of citizenship, religion, creed, political stance, ethnic origin, race, colour, age or gender. It has argued that the processes of academic research and scholarship, and the unfettered pursuit of knowledge, are of benefit to mankind as a whole. Moreover, these processes and goals are dependent for their advance upon the freedom of scholars to converse, to make contact, to travel to conferences, to publish their results and to proffer advice. It is, therefore, in the interests of governments, institutions and above all individuals – whether themselves scholars or not – to support this principle of non-discrimination. Bona fide scholars pursuing academic activities should be free to do so without hindrance.

Recent moves to foster an academic boycott of Israeli scientists and the dismissal of two Israeli scholars from their roles on the editorial boards of two journals published in the United Kingdom are a flagrant breach of this principle and have rightly drawn substantial adverse comment from scientists, newspaper columnists and human rights activists in the United Kingdom.

On behalf of the Executive Board of ICSU, we draw attention to these events to remind all our national member academies and research councils, as well as our scientific unions and associates, of the critical importance of the principle of non-discrimination and of the need for constant vigil in securing its continuing adoption. We understand the strong feelings generated by conflicts, for example that which is ongoing in the Middle East, and the desire of individuals and groups to avoid contact, actively boycott or otherwise demonstrate distaste or disgust for the actions of nation state governments and others. But to do so through the medium of individual scholars is to sacrifice a profoundly important principle of freedom.

We urge all scholarly communities and not least those in science and technology, to heed the words of the Leader (Editor) in the *London Evening Standard* on 10 July 2002: “Intellectual communities world-wide are in the business of fostering international understanding and co-operation not of penalising each other for the shortcomings of their governments.”

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