

INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON BIOSECURITY

**Remarks on behalf of ICSU
Francis Gudyanga – Research Council of
Zimbabwe
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ICSU's Mission

‘Strengthening international science for the benefit of society’ with the emphasis being equally placed on “science” and “society”.

Who does ICSU represent?

Founded in 1931, the International Council for Science (ICSU) is a non-governmental organization representing a global membership that includes 103 national scientific bodies and 27 international disciplinary scientific unions.

ICSU helps create international and regional networks of scientists with similar interests and maintains close working relationships with a number of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations.

Because of its broad contact with thousands of scientists worldwide, ICSU is increasingly called upon to speak on behalf of the global scientific community and to act as an advisor in matters ranging from ethics to the environment.

Why has ICSU agreed to co-sponsor this meeting

We believe that there are implications for the whole of international science and the debate has to be broadened beyond the USA and Europe. The changing international political climate and concerns about international terrorism and national security present new challenges to the Universality of science. Threatened boycotts on scientists for certain countries, restrictions on publications and exchange of materials, withholding of travel visas and work permits, are just a few examples which are not just theoretical but are already happening in some parts of the world.

At the same time we have to acknowledge the very real concerns of governments and policy-makers. Much new scientific knowledge has the potential for both good and harm – the dual use dilemma. In the area of life sciences in particular, the potential to generate new and more virulent infectious agents is very real and alarm bells are ringing in many sectors of society.

Universality of Science Principle

One of the basic principles in ICSU's Statutes is that of the universality of science, which affirms the right and freedom of scientists to associate in international scientific activity without regard to such factors as citizenship, religion, creed, political stance, ethnic origin, race, colour, language, age or sex. Such rights

are embodied in a variety of articles in the International Bill of Human rights.

As the intrinsic nature of science is universal, its success depends on cooperation, interaction and exchange, often beyond national boundaries.

Therefore, ICSU strongly supports the principle that scientists must have the free access to each other and to scientific data and information. It is only through such access that international scientific cooperation flourishes and science thus progresses.

On the basis of its firm and unwavering commitment to the principle of the universality of science, ICSU reaffirms its opposition to any actions which weaken or undermine this principle.

The Challenge

The challenge is for the whole international scientific community to work together with policy makers and other stakeholders in society to agree on an appropriate balance. That is why we are here – to start the international dialogue and try and work out what is both necessary and feasible for all of us in all our different settings.

The Urgency

Finally coming from Africa I would just like to mention the priority that we should attach to this topic. AIDS/HIV is rife in Africa and many of my colleagues would argue that bio-terrorism is a distraction and we should focus our efforts on the

naturally occurring infectious diseases that are currently desiminating particularly the poorer populations of the World. It is a strong argument that is hard to refute. However, the point is that the two cannot be separated. Tackling AIDS/HIV requires a truly international scientific effort – the open international exchange of scientists, information and materials. This is what is under threat if we are not all vigilant and careful in considering the implications of biosecurity for international science.

THANK YOU