

International Council for Science

“Strengthening international science
for the benefit of Society.....”

BWC Experts meeting, June 13-24,
Geneva

What is ICSU

Members

- 27 disciplinary International Scientific Unions
- 103 multidisciplinary National Scientific Members

Functions

1. Planning and coordinating international Research
2. A voice for International science in a policy context
3. Strengthening the Universality of Science

Today's Menu

- **The Principle of Universality of Science**
- **International Forum on Biosecurity, Lake Como, March 2005**
- **What might Scientists and Governments do?**

Universality

The principle of Universality

“The principle of the Universality of Science is fundamental to scientific progress. This principle embodies freedom of movement, association, expression and communication for scientists as well as equitable access to data, information and research materials.ICSU opposes any discrimination on the basis of such factors as ethnic origin, religion, citizenship, language, political stance, gender, sex or age...”



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Universality

The Concern:

“Various measures, often imposed on security grounds, in a number of countries are undermining the principle of Universality.....These issues are often complex and have broader policy implications involving careful judgments as to the appropriate balance between the freedom to pursue science and national and international policy imperatives.”

Biosecurity Forum

- Lake Como Italy, 20-22 March 2005
- Sponsored by ICSU, IAP, IAMP, NAS, RS
- Supported by Nuclear Threat Initiative and Sloan Foundation
- ~70 scientists (and a few policy-makers) from over ~30 countries

Discussed:

- Guidelines and Codes
- Information dissemination/access
- Oversight Mechanisms

Biosecurity Forum

Sensitive Research or Information

Basic Knowledge →→→→→→→→ Application
Open → 'sensitive' → classified

Much basic knowledge is potentially 'dual use'

'Sensitive' if the benefits of limiting its dissemination exceed the costs of controlling it



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Points of Agreement:

The benefits of increasing access to information and openness in science are enormous

‘Sensitive’ research and information does exist but cannot restrict access at the end of the research chain, i.e. at publication stage – neither desirable nor practicable

Responsibility and shared ownership of knowledge is better than trying to put walls around it



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Points of Agreement

Public confidence and government concerns must be addressed by scientific community

Pragmatically we cannot control access but need to demonstrate responsibility

Multiple check points already exist in research process and can incorporate bio-security

Need to persuade the public and policy makers of the importance (=social benefit) of universality in science.



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Other issues:

Fundamental/basic scientific knowledge is distinct from applied research, e.g. weaponization.

‘Bio’ has some special features but other areas of science, e.g. nanotech, also could be ‘sensitive’

What is the role of scientists in government (or private) programmes – do we want them more open or rather have them classified?

Roles for the Scientific Community

Aim: reduce inadvertent assistance towards misuse

1. Support universality, openness and transparency;
2. Raise ethical and regulatory awareness
3. Strengthen bio-safety practices
4. Provide expert input to the BWC

All above may include developing and implementing various codes and guidelines and education and training.

Roles for Governments

Aim: Prevent deliberate misuse

1. Develop code(s) of conduct for Govt scientists;
2. Provide the legal framework for applied biodefense research
3. Strengthen the BWC
4. Provide resources for strengthening biosafety and public health systems

NB Governments set the R&D agenda



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AND FINALLY

Don't try and develop the perfect
Universal guidelines on biosecurity
practices for scientists