



Jane Lubchenco, President

10 June 2004

Dr. George H. Atkinson
Science and Technology Advisor
US Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear George,

I write as the President of the International Council for Science (ICSU) to express grave concern about the continuing restrictions placed on scientists' participation in international scientific meetings that is resulting from current U.S. visa policies. These policies are having unintended consequences: they have erected a major barrier to the progress of science and to the free and open exchange of scientific knowledge that the U.S. has traditionally championed. In the end, the participation of scientists from around the world in scientific conferences, symposia and other meetings strengthens democracy and benefits all citizens. The U.S. has unintentionally become a major impediment to global scientific progress instead of a strong supporter of the open exchange of knowledge for the betterment of citizens of the world. I understand the rationale for the instigation of these policies, but also know that their original formulation is causing undue and unintended consequences. The global scientific community requests your assistance in bringing balance to U.S. visa policies. We are hopeful that America's historic support of science and its powerful potential to improve society around the world might be reestablished.

Science is by its nature international. The science community has a strong tradition of open publication of results from scientific research, collaboration in large international research programmes, open debates and discussions at scientific symposia and congresses. This international collaboration and the associated free and open exchange and challenge of new knowledge are essential for the creation of new knowledge. As you know well, this new knowledge in turn drives the economic and social development of nations.

ICSU has a long and proud tradition of facilitating and supporting international cooperation within the science community. Science transcends national boundaries; it is indeed universal. One of ICSU's core principles is the Principle of the Universality of Science. This principle is defined in ICSU's statutes and has been a cornerstone for policy and action.

The Principle of the Universality of Science is fundamental to scientific progress. This principle embodies freedom of movement, association, expression and communication for scientists. In pursuing its objectives in support of the rights and responsibilities of scientists, ICSU actively upholds this principle, and, in doing so, opposes any discrimination on the basis of factors such as ethnic origin, religion, citizenship, language, political stance, gender or age. ICSU does not accept disruption of its own activities by statements or actions that intentionally or otherwise prevent the application of this principle.

The prevention of *bona fide* scientists' attendance at international scientific meetings counters this Principle of Universality. U.S. visa policies are doing just that. ICSU has already expressed concern about this problem. In September 2001 ICSU's President Professor Hiroyuki Yoshikawa of Japan and the Chairman of the ICSU Committee on the Freedom in the Conduct of Science, Professor James C. I. Dooge from Ireland, wrote to Secretary of State Colin L. Powell to point out the potential problems relating to the security measures introduced by the United States.

More recently, (3 December 2003) one of the ICSU international scientific unions, the International Union of Pure and Applied Physics (IUPAP), wrote to Dr. John H. Marburger, Director of OSTP, stating that "if scientists are excluded from attending IUPAP sponsored international conferences by a host country on ground of national origin, IUPAP should not sponsor any further events in that country until such exclusions have been eliminated". IUPAP concludes that under the current restrictions, IUPAP cannot guarantee its sponsorship of future US-based conferences. ICSU is concerned that other ICSU bodies will make similar recommendations should the current problems with US visa procedures not be addressed.

We also note the "Statement and Recommendations on Visa Problems Harming America's Scientific, Economic, and Security Interest" of 12 May 2004 in which more than 20 scientific, higher-education and engineering groups in the US have urged the US government to adopt some practical recommendations for solving the current visa-processing crisis.

The U.S. is the premier scientific nation. The international scientific community depends on close ties and collaboration with the U.S. scientific community. This role makes it all the more important for our nation to lead in its facilitation and support of the free and open exchange of scientific information and of scientists. It is my hope that the U.S. government can find appropriate solutions to the current visa problems in a way that strongly and truly supports the development of science while also addressing its legitimate security interests.

I appreciate your efforts to resolve the problems, request resolution of the current difficulties and offer my support toward those ends.

Sincerely,

Jane Lubchenco
ICSU President

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