

## Scientists should promote co-operation, not boycott

SIR — Since 1931, the International Council for Science (ICSU) has upheld the principle of the universality of science, based on the right of scientists to work without discrimination on the grounds of citizenship, religion, creed, political stance, ethnic origin, race, colour, age or gender.

The entire ICSU membership, representing the scientific community in 112 countries and all disciplines, has consistently expressed its unequivocal support for this principle. This stance has stood the test of time throughout the Cold War, apartheid in South Africa and the new challenges posed by international terrorism. It is a strong expression of solidarity across the international science community: a critical reference point for individual scholars confronted with threats to their freedom.

The decision by the congress of the UK University and College Union to recommend that its members bar academic exchanges with Israeli researchers is a flagrant breach of this principle. It has rightly drawn substantial adverse comment from scientists, newspaper columnists and human-rights activists in the United Kingdom and internationally.

It is easy to understand the strong feelings generated by conflicts and people's desire to demonstrate their opposition to the actions of governments. But to do so through the medium of individual scholars is to sacrifice a profoundly important principle of freedom and solidarity. In situations of strife and conflict, it is surely the duty of scientists to promote international understanding and co-operation — not to penalize each other for the shortcomings of their governments.

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## US government enforces boycott of whole countries

SIR — The US Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG) processes the applications of foreign students for the US Medical Licensing Examination, which evaluates candidates' basic and clinical knowledge in medicine. The examination has two steps, both of which must be passed for the ECFMG to recognize the individual as a medical doctor in the United States.

As a medical student, I applied for step 1 in January 2007, entering my country (Iran) in the contact address section. A message in red letters appeared on the registration page: "It