

CORRESPONDENCE

Sanctions against scientists threaten progress

SIR — Several European countries, including France, the Netherlands and Sweden, are now routinely refusing work visas and study positions in the physical sciences to Iranian scientists and students. This is in response to UN resolution 1737, imposing sanctions on Iran for failing to halt uranium enrichment, and reflects international concern about the potential proliferation of nuclear-weapons technology. The result has been blanket discrimination simply on the basis of nationality.

Similar national-security policies against academics operate in the Middle East. The permit criteria used by Israel's security services for Palestinian postgraduate students are so restrictive that they effectively prohibit entry. Israeli universities have protested, in a letter sent to the defence ministry, that these policies constitute "a gross and harmful intervention by military elements in purely academic considerations" (see <http://go.nature.com/iFljgR>).

The International Council for Science (ICSU) affirms, in its principle of universality in science, that all scientists should have the opportunity to participate in legitimate scientific activities. ICSU's committee on freedom and responsibility in the conduct of science, which I chair, continuously monitors breaches of this principle. We have recently called for the scientific community to commit to opposing all such discrimination (see <http://go.nature.com/2UmM5M>).

Academic institutions should have the responsibility and freedom to select students and staff without political or military interference. If selected individuals are refused entry or a work visa after security screening, the reasons should be made clear to that person.

International collaboration and openness in science

education and research are essential for meeting pressing global challenges. Systematic discrimination against scientists based on nationality is a serious threat to scientific progress.

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