Stever, a former director of the NSF.

The colloquium—sponsored by the U.N. Advisory Committee on Science and Technology (ACAST) and attended by some 300 scientists, engineers, and physicians—heard encouraging news about what could be done in the area of development but also complaints that the discussions in Vienna were esoteric and far removed from the actual development process.

The group's final report, which called for increased research in such areas as food production, transportation, health maintenance, and alternative energy sources, admitted that its ideas had been "articulated in various fora during the past."

Unlike the ACAST report, the UNCSTD report on "Science, Technology, and the Future," to which the U.S. scientists struggled to contribute, did not contain specific recommendations but simply reiterated discussions that had taken place in the conference.

What finally emerged was a statement that reaffirmed that science and technology could provide powerful tools to overcome the worst aspects of poverty and dependence in all countries. The report mentioned the need for a "massive expansion" of the educational system in the developing world; it urged governments in the developing countries to create "attractive work environments" presumably to attack the problem of "brain drain"; and it asked both the developing and the developed countries to set up appropriate institutions to encourage young people to become involved in the development process.

A third meeting, the forum for nongovernmental organizations (NGO), was held simultaneously with the main U.N. conference and also produced a document. It was long on rhetoric about promoting UNCSTD's plan of action and building "new alliances" between developed and developing countries but short on specific proposals for how those goals might be achieved.

The problem, explained Karim Ahmed, chairman of the NGO forum, is that while 1400 individuals representing 366 nongovernmental organizations from 51 countries may have been interested in development in the large sense, each group had its own specific problems and goals that often have little direct connection with each other. Antinuclear groups, for example, are not likely to be interested in the same problems as women's rights groups.

U.S. officials see the Institute for Scientific and Technological Cooperation (ISTC), the new federal agency created this summer by Congress, as one mechanism for coordinating both the foreign development efforts of governmental agencies and the work of nongovernmental groups, including universities and scientific organizations. But most top-notch scientists in the United States have shown relatively little interest in the basic scientific and technological problems facing the developing world, preferring instead a highly technical, sophisticated brand of American science.

Nevertheless, many of the U.S. delegates when they left Vienna were optimistic that, if Congress provides the support for the new federal agency and restores some of the cuts it has made in travel budgets for scientific research, a good deal of attention can be focused on the problems of development.

The Carter Administration's plan for ISTC in the fiscal year that begins 1 October includes a $90 million budget, only about $25 million of which would go to new projects. An additional $66 million in ongoing research support would be shifted from the Agency for International Development (AID).

U.S. delegates returning home to lobby for congressional support also faced the prospects of a battle over the support they had committed to the new international fund. While the U.S. share of the $25 million fund will not have to be appropriated until fiscal 1981, a "pledging conference" is expected to be scheduled by the U.N. before the end of this year.

The battle to make good the commitments in Vienna does not promise to be an easy one. While a handful of U.S. congressmen were present at the conference, few have even heard of UNCSTD or what it proposes to do.

—ANNE C. ROARK

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# Major Relaxation in DNA Rules

A proposal that would cause a major shrinkage in the scope of the NIH guidelines on recombinant DNA experiments was agreed to this month by the NIH committee which authored the guidelines. The proposal would in effect exempt all experiments in which *E. coli* K12 is the host for recombinant DNA molecules. Such experiments account for an estimated 80 to 85 percent of those covered by the guidelines.

The measure, which is subject to approval by the NIH director, passed the 25-member committee by a 10-to-4 vote. It will leave the complex NIH guidelines looking like a large head on top of a rather small body, but the body is growing under the present trend of using other host cells besides the standard bacterium *E. coli* K12.

The proposal to exempt *E. coli* K12 experiments was first made at a May meeting of the committee by NIH virologist Wallace Rowe. "It takes away a huge amount of nonsense and hairsplitting and paper work," Rowe says.

The basis of his proposal is the accumulating evidence that the K12 bacterium cannot accidentally be made pathogenic by inserts of recombinant DNA. Also, new techniques for inserting the DNA—on "non-mobilizable" plasmids—ensure that the molecules cannot escape to other bacteria.

Richard Goldstein of the Harvard Medical School, who voted against the proposal, believes the committee should have waited for the results of a new risk assessment study of *E. coli* K12 which the NIH itself had commissioned. Goldstein also believes that major changes in the rules should require the votes of at least half the committee's full membership.

NIH virologist Susan Gottesman regards the exemption as a natural extension and tidying up of the committee's thinking on *E. coli* K12 experiments. She voted against the proposal, however, although only narrowly, because she feels more thought should be given to the consequences of *E. coli* K12 bacteria programmed to produce hormones and antigens.

The new proposal offers effective but not total exemption from the NIH rules. Researchers must still notify their local biosafety committees of *E. coli* K12 experiments and conduct the work under P1 safety conditions.

The NIH committee at its meeting last month also endorsed provisions which extend the guidelines to industry. The Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association agrees that the provisions provide adequate protection for commercial secrets revealed to the NIH committee.—NICHOLAS WADE


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