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Addressing fears. Concern about human cloning and other issues led to UNESCO ethics statement.

UNESCO Drafts Bioethics Declaration

A United Nations (U.N.) draft statement on the ethics of cloning and profiting from human genome studies is winning praise from U.S. officials because it avoids prohibiting any specific research protocol and describes the freedom of inquiry as a fundamental human right. On cloning, for example, it avoids asking for an outright ban—which Germany wanted—and says instead that practices "contrary to human dignity" such as reproductive cloning of humans "should not be permitted." But Noëlle Lenoir, a French jurist who chairs the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) panel drawing up the draft, also ran into some skepticism last month in Washington, D.C., when she talked to leaders of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

As a lapsed member of UNESCO, the United States cannot vote for or against UNESCO's "Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights," and NIH officials have not commented on it publicly. But according to diplomatic sources, NIH staffers—including Deputy Director Ruth Kirschstein and genome institute chief Francis Collins—have spoken privately of their qualms about Article 4 of the declaration, which appears to rule out the patenting of genes. It says: "The human genome in its natural state may not give rise to pecuniary gains." That clause "does not reflect reality," says one U.S. official. While UNESCO most likely will not make any changes in this wording, says a French government science official, it may allow U.S. observers to attend the final review at a plenary meeting in Paris next month and register their reservations.

Lenoir hopes the UNESCO statement will win at least tacit support from the United States. For without it, other major industrial countries might follow Canada—which for domestic political reasons has abstained from endorsing the document—and unravel a fragile consensus.

Irish Science Headed For Funding Boost

After years of debating how Irish research should be improved, Ireland may finally be close to showing scientists the money. Earlier this week, a government science advisory council released a set of specific targets for reshaping and boosting Ireland's $1.3 billion science and technology budget. "The recommendations represent an urgent input into the [1998] budget process," says council member Donald Fitzmaurice, a chemist at University College Dublin.

The Irish Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation was set up by law this year as recommended by a 1996 white paper (*Science*, 8 November 1996, p. 911). The council wants the government to increase the basic research budget from $3.2 million to $9.5 million, boost stipends for grad students from $3200 to $8000, roughly double the $19 million spent on industrial research, and address an equipment crisis in Irish colleges and schools.

The recommendations have gotten a mixed review from the Irish Research Scientists' Association, which thinks the proposed increase of $6.3 million is too little. "If we were in line with the European average, then our budget would be $63 million," says Executive Secretary John Donovan. Council member Emer Colleran, a microbiologist at University College Galway, agrees that the money for research in Ireland is "out of line" with the rest of Europe, but says, "we believe that we have made a step in the right direction." Researchers will find out how just how big a step the government will actually take when the 1998 budget is unveiled on 3 December.

Scientific Leaders Press for Climate Treaty

Hoping to build momentum for a strong commitment to addressing the threat of global warming at December's climate treaty meeting in Kyoto, Japan, more than 1500 prominent scientists this week unveiled a statement calling on all governments to take "immediate" steps to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

The statement, organized by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), follows several similar letters this year, including one authored by economists and an Internet message endorsed by nearly 3000 scientists. But the latest list may be the most impressive yet, including "National Academy–level scientists from across the globe," as UCS chair Henry Kendall said. The signers include 98 of the 171 living Nobelists in science and officials of dozens of national academies of science. The eclectic group, ranging from astronomers to microbiologists, includes Bert Bolin, who chaired the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change until this week. Some other prominent climate scientists apparently chose to recuse themselves.

The statement calls for "legally binding commitments to reduce industrial nations' emissions of heat-trapping gases significantly below 1990 levels in accordance with a near-term timetable." Developing nations, it adds, should limit emissions "over time"—a softer stance than the U.S. Senate has taken. Next stop on the road to Kyoto: a White House summit to discuss policy options on 6 October.

'Virtual' Money Helps Internet Project

The National Science Foundation (NSF) plans to get out of the Internet business, which it helped to create, sometime next year. But in the meantime federal legislators have tapped an off-the-books fund fueled by the Net's growing popularity to pay for NSF's share of the Administration's Next Generation Internet (NGI) initiative. The novel arrangement is a shot in the arm for the 1-year-old, $100 million NGI, which has gotten lukewarm support in Congress due to fears it will widen the technological gap between regions of the country. In a tight budget (see p. 30), it also frees up money for NSF's other research programs.

Last week House and Senate conferees on NSF's 1998 budget earmarked $23 million for NGI from a pot created by a $50 annual fee collected by Network Solutions Inc. (NSI) of Herndon, Virginia, to register domain names—.com, .org, and .net, for example (*Science*, 14 March, p. 1563). That makes NSF the second biggest player in the six-agency NGI, after the $42 million to be spent by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

The money covers both NSF's $10 million request to Congress and $13 million it had hoped to obtain from the Department of Energy (DOE) to foster university connections. But last week DOE's spending panel zeroed out its request for $35 million for NGI, leaving its participation in doubt for 1998. Three other agencies seem likely to receive their requests, which total $20 million.

Ironically, the question of who should assign domain names is under scrutiny by the House Science Committee, which authorizes NSF programs. But an NSF official says the spending panel's action is simply a way "to give NSF what it needs for NGI" without passing judgment on the future of NSF's contract with NSI, which expires in March.