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October 18, 2004

To: Members of the United Nations General Assembly
From: ISSCR Board of Directors

Your Excellency:

On behalf of the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR), we write to express our grave concern over a proposed ban on all forms of human cloning, which would include any use of human nuclear transfer (NT, also known as therapeutic cloning) for medical research purposes.

We represent the Board of Directors of the International Society for Stem Cell Research, the primary international organization of scientific, ethical and clinical researchers in the field of stem cell biology. ISSCR is dedicated to fostering beneficial scientific and medical research using stem cells with the goal of understanding and treating deadly human diseases. Our members study stem cells of all types including stem cells from human adult tissue and from human embryos and germ cells. Millions of people worldwide depend on the advances that medical research brings and yearn for the knowledge and therapies that can help alleviate the human suffering caused by injury and illness. The goal of the ISSCR is to meet this challenge.

The ISSCR is opposed to any resolutions that declare a global ban on any use of the NT procedure with human cells. Practiced appropriately, NT (therapeutic cloning) is about saving and improving lives. It is fundamentally different from human reproductive cloning; appropriate uses of NT produce stem cells, not babies.

The ISSCR continues to support proposals that ban human reproductive cloning while preserving the use of human NT for beneficial medical research.

The scientific, ethical, and medical data and discussions presented at our recent meeting in Boston of more than 1,400 researchers from 29 countries made it clearer than ever that research on all types of stem cells should be pursued with the goals of reducing human suffering and better understanding human physiology. Our scientific, ethical and medical researchers support reasonable regulation and oversight of our work, and we call for clear and rational limits for the use of techniques such as nuclear transfer.

Based on the most current scientific data and ethical considerations, our organization supports the following points: 1) Research on all types of stem cells should be pursued. These include stem cells found in fetal and adult tissues and pluripotent stem cells isolated from blastocysts or derived by nuclear transfer. 2) Basic research should be allowed for all human embryonic/pluripotent stem cell lines derived from excess in vitro fertilization (IVF) blastocysts that would otherwise be destroyed, following appropriate informed consent and donation practices. 3) The derivation of new human pluripotent stem cell lines by nuclear transfer (NT) should be supported. 4) Appropriate regulation of research is important and should be developed by scientists and regulators working together to provide ongoing scientific and ethical oversight to ensure compliance with the above, as well as to establish norms for good basic research, clinical investigation and laboratory practices. 5) Given current scientific and medical safety concerns, and widespread moral and ethical consensus, human reproductive cloning, defined as implantation into a uterus of morulae or blastocysts derived by nuclear transfer, should be prohibited at this time.

We would be pleased to offer our scientists as experts that you may call upon for questions about NT, stem cell research, and human cloning. Our goal is to work with you to ensure that an agreement is reached on a global treaty to ban human reproductive cloning, but still allow scientists and researchers around the world to pursue ethical and appropriate stem cell research including NT (therapeutic cloning). We believe that this research can be pursued within strict ethical guidelines, so that understanding and therapies for humanity's most debilitating diseases can be found.

Sincerely,
ISSCR Board of Directors