

CAMPAIGN FOR
THE PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT OF THE BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES
By the Council for Responsible Genetics (CRG)

We, the undersigned are deeply concerned by the current expansion of United States research on biological weapons agents. With the stated aim of developing vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostic tools to defend civilian populations against bioterrorism, the United States has entered uncharted territory. We believe that the current biodefense expansion has the potential to seriously threaten public safety, international security, and the vitality of open biomedical research, and to drain scarce resources from key public health programs.

The purpose of the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) is to “exclude completely the possibility of bacteriological (biological) agents and toxins being used as weapons” by prohibiting the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition, and retention of such weapons.

However, a substantial area of “defensive” research involves activities that are indistinguishable from those conducted for offensive purposes. For example, efforts to diagnose and treat exposure to biological weapons necessarily involve their production and dispersal. Therefore, states must provide concrete transparency measures to verify their defensive intent. The United States has undermined such efforts, by rejecting an inspection and verification protocol to the BWC, and has since embarked on a sweeping expansion in its biological defense research. This research includes efforts to explore the properties of novel biological agents with enhanced offensive characteristics in the name of “threat assessment.” We believe that the present construction of over a dozen new high-containment laboratories across the country that will handle potential biological warfare agents will further undermine the United States’ commitment to biological disarmament.

The proliferation of these laboratories greatly increases the likelihood of accidental and intentional releases that could threaten public safety and security. Technological improvements in the design of these facilities may reduce, but cannot hope to eliminate, the consequences of human error and wrongdoing. Bhopal and Three Mile Island are only a few of the many disastrous incidents that experts never anticipated. The knowledge and access to resources these facilities create can also be dangerously misused. As the 2001 anthrax mailings showed, biodefense laboratories have become a source of home grown terrorism.

Infectious diseases such as influenza, tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria, SARS, and HIV/AIDS represent a global public health crisis of the highest order, to which the United States must urgently respond. In such a climate, the growing diversion of needed public health resources toward speculative threats should be approached with the greatest skepticism. We believe that inflated and poorly substantiated claims of catastrophic bioterrorism have been marshaled to justify this diversion.

At the same time, we are deeply troubled by the specter of secrecy and security restrictions in biomedical research. Open disclosure is critical to maintaining public confidence in the integrity of scientific work. Censorship and classification of research, not seen at this scale since the Cold War era in physics, strike at the core of fundamental values such as academic freedom, the advancement of knowledge, and the use of public funds for public benefits. These new policies have not been backed by clear and specific threats associated with the dissemination of scientific findings.

We therefore call for the following:

1. A moratorium on the current proliferation of new biological defense laboratories, whose missions do not serve a compelling public health purpose;
2. A rejection of the proposed multi-billion dollar biodefense spending initiative for the development of drugs and vaccines to defend against potential biological weapons, and a redirection of such spending toward pressing public health needs;
3. A prohibition against the development of novel biological and toxic agents, or the modification of biological agents, to enhance virulence, pathogenicity, or transmission characteristics, for any purposes, including biological defense;
4. A reversal of efforts to classify basic research in biology, whether that research is conducted by government, university, or private actors;
5. The creation of mandatory public reporting requirements for all accidents, including laboratory infections, environmental releases and breaches of security, at Biosafety Level 2, 3 and 4 facilities across the country;
6. The full disclosure of minutes from all institutional biosafety committees in universities and other institutions involved in biological defense research.
7. A reaffirmation of commitment to the Biological Weapons Convention and to the Nuremberg Principles, according to which acting under the direction of a government does not relieve people of their responsibilities under international law.

ORGANIZATIONAL SPONSORS

Physicians for Social Responsibility
The Center for DNA Identification Technology and Human Rights

LIST OF INDIVIDUAL SIGNERS

Kathryn E. Adams
Research Associate/Doctoral Candidate
University of Massachusetts at Lowell

Alexa Albert, MD
Pediatric Resident
University of Washington

Macrene Alexiades, MD, PhD
Department of Dermatology
Yale University School of Medicine

George Annas, JD, MPH
Edward R. Utley Professor
Dept. of Health Law, Bioethics & Human Rights
Boston University School of Public Health

Evan Balaban, PhD
Associate Professor of Psychology
McGill University

Michael V.L. Bennett, D.Phil. (Oxon)
Professor of Neuroscience
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Bronx, New York

Paul Billings, MD, PhD
Vice President for Genetics and Genomics
Laboratory Corporation of America

Susan Bonner-Weir, PhD
Associate Professor of Medicine
Harvard Medical School

Sujatha Byravan, PhD
Executive Director
Council for Responsible Genetics

Faye Camardo
Tellus Institute

Eric Chivian, MD
Director, Center for health and the Global Environment
Harvard Medical School

Richard Clapp, DSc., MPH
Professor
Boston University School of Public Health

Hillel W. Cohen, DrPH
Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Population Health
Albert Einstein College of Medicine
Bronx, New York

Michael Cohen, PhD
Associate Professor of Cognitive and Neural Systems
Boston University

Norman Daniels, PhD
Professor of Ethics and Population Health
Harvard School of Public Health

Patricia A. D'Amore, PhD
Professor of Ophthalmology and Pathology
Harvard Medical School

David Dubnau, PhD
Public Health Research Institute
Newark, New Jersey

Gary R. Goldstein, PhD
Professor of Physics and Astronomy
Tufts University

Daniel Goodenough, PhD
Professor of Cell Biology
Harvard Medical School

Ursula Goodenough, PhD
Professor of Biology
Washington University in St. Louis

Ward H. Goodenough, PhD
Emeritus University Professor of Anthropology
University of Pennsylvania

Robert Gould, MD
Associate Pathologist, Kaiser-Santa Teresa Community Hospital
President SF-Bay Area chapter of Physicians for Social Responsibility
Immediate Past-President of National PSR

Dr. Sherri L. Green, PhD
Durham, North Carolina

Beverly M. Hector-Smith
Natick, MA

Martha Herbert, MD, PhD
Harvard Medical School

Ruth Hubbard, PhD
Professor Emerita of Biology
Harvard University

H. Patricia Hynes, PhD
Professor of Environmental Health
Boston University School of Public Health

Jonathan King, PhD
Professor of Molecular Biology
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Mark Klein, PhD

Norwood, MA

Nancy Krieger, PhD
Associate Professor
Dept of Society, Human Development and Health
Harvard School of Public Health

Sheldon Krimsky, PhD
Professor of Urban and Environmental Policy
Tufts University

Robert S. Lawrence, MD
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Annette Huber-Lee, PhD
Stockholm Environment Institute, Boston

Yuan T. Lee, PhD
Nobel Laureate, Chemistry 1986
President, Academia Sinica
Taiwan, R.O.C.

Wayne Lencer, MD
Associate Professor of Pediatrics
Harvard Medical School

Daniel H. Lowenstein, MD
Professor of Neurology
University of California, San Francisco

Michael McCally, MD, PhD
Clinical Professor of Community and Preventive Medicine,
Mount Sinai School of Medicine

Paula Menyuk, PhD
Professor Emerita
Boston University

Leonard Mindich, PhD
Public Health Research Institute
Newark, New Jersey

Elliot G. Mishler, PhD
Professor of Social Psychology
Harvard Medical School

Robert K. Musil, PhD, MPH
Executive Director and CEO
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Washington, DC 20009

Linda Musil, PhD
Assistant Professor of Medicine
Oregon Health & Science University

Margaret C. Neville, PhD
Professor of Physiology and Biophysics
University of Colorado Health Sciences Center

Stuart A. Newman, PhD
Professor of Cell Biology and Anatomy
New York Medical College

Asma Nusrat, MD
Emory University
Pathology and Laboratory Medicine

David Ozonoff, MD, MPH
Professor of Environmental Health
Boston University School of Public Health

Sudhir C Rajan, DEnv
Senior Fellow, Tellus Institute

Rayna Rapp, PhD
Professor of Anthropology
New York University

Anthony Robbins, MD, MPA
Professor of Public Health
Tufts University School of Medicine

Lawrence Rosenwald, PhD
Professor of English
Co-Director of Peace and Justice Studies
Wellesley College

Kitt Shaffer, MD, PhD
Harvard University

Jo Shapiro, MD
Chief, Division of Otolaryngology
Brigham and Womens Hospital
Associate Director of GME for Partners

John Shepherd, MD
President, Colorado Chapter
Physicians for Social Responsibility

Victor Sidel, MD
Professor of Social Medicine
Montefiore Medical Center
Albert Einstein College of Medicine

Ethan Signer, PhD
Professor Emeritus
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Stephen Soldz
Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis.
Brookline, MA

Michael R. Stallcup, PhD
Department of Pathology
University of Southern California

David Suzuki, PhD
British Columbia
Canada

Laurie Lola Vollen, MD, MPH
Director of the DNA Identification & Human Rights Project
University of California, Berkeley

Daniel H Wainstock, PhD
Senior Editor, Developmental Cell
Cambridge, MA

Richard Wetzler, PhD
Director, Watson International Scholars of the Environment
Global Environment Program
Brown University

Roberta F. White, PhD
Professor and Chair
Department of Environmental Health
Boston University School of Public Health

Susan Wright, PhD
Historian and Research Scientist
University of Michigan

Alan S.L Yu, MD
Assistant Professor of Medicine
University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine