

IAP STATEMENT ON BIOSECURITY

*Knowledge without conscience
is simply the ruin of the soul.*
F. Rabelais, 1532¹

In recent decades scientific research has created new and unexpected knowledge and technologies that offer unprecedented opportunities to improve human and animal health and environmental conditions. But some science and technology can be used for destructive purposes as well as for constructive purposes. Scientists have a special responsibility when it comes to problems of "dual use" and the misuse of science and technology.

The 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention reinforced the international norm prohibiting biological weapons, stating in its provisions that "*each state party to this Convention undertakes never in any circumstances to develop, produce, stockpile or otherwise acquire or retain: microbial or other biological agents, or toxins whatever their origin or method of production, of types and in quantities that have no justification for prophylactic or other peaceful purposes.*" Nevertheless, the threat from biological weapons is again a live issue. This statement presents principles to guide individual scientists and local scientific communities that may wish to define a code of conduct for their own use.

These principles represent fundamental issues that should be taken into account when formulating codes of conduct. They are not intended to be a comprehensive list of considerations.

1. **Awareness.** Scientists have an obligation to do no harm. They should always take into consideration the reasonably foreseeable consequences of their own activities. They should therefore:

- always bear in mind the potential consequences – possibly harmful – of their research and recognize that individual good conscience does not justify ignoring the possible misuse of their scientific endeavour;
- refuse to undertake research that has only harmful consequences for humankind.

Safety and Security. Scientists working with agents such as pathogenic organisms or dangerous toxins have a responsibility to use good, safe and secure laboratory procedures, whether codified by law or common practice.²

¹ "Science sans conscience n'est que ruine de l'âme."

² Such as the WHO Laboratory Biosafety Manual, Second Edition (Revised).

3. **Education and Information.** Scientists should be aware of, disseminate information about and teach national and international laws and regulations, as well as policies and principles aimed at preventing the misuse of biological research.
4. **Accountability.** Scientists who become aware of activities that violate the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention or international customary law should raise their concerns with appropriate people, authorities and agencies.
5. **Oversight.** Scientists with responsibility for oversight of research or for evaluation of projects or publications should promote adherence to these principles by those under their control, supervision or evaluation and act as role models in this regard.