

# The Guardian

## Will the UN ban human cloning?

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Thursday June 3, 2004

[The Guardian](#)

Who knows? This is, after all, the topsy turvy world of international politics where UN delegates have been considering various proposals on cloning put forward by Belgium, Iran and Costa Rica - hardly heavyweights in the field. What's certain is that the story will run and run, at least until a decision is taken later this year.

This week the scientists got their retaliation in first, and a succession of researchers lined up to demand a ban on cloning babies. They did this for two reasons: first because they genuinely believe it would be a very bad idea. Cloning is an imperfect science and as Ian Wilmut, creator of Dolly the sheep, warned, an attempt to genetically recreate a human would result in a lots of late abortions and dead babies.

Second, the scientists believe that this is the best way to separate the harmful image of such reproductive cloning from what they call therapeutic cloning, which they genuinely believe is a very good idea.

The two are easy to confuse as both start with an embryo grown from DNA transplanted into an empty egg. But while reproductive cloners would implant this embryo into a woman to produce a baby, therapeutic cloners only go as far as extracting its stem cells. These could be used to treat a number of medical conditions.

Britain was one of the first to ban reproductive cloning, while allowing therapeutic cloning. Others, like some in the United States including its president, don't see the distinction and want to outlaw both.

Last November, UN delegates looked set to vote on a resolution suggested by Costa Rica (with a serious nudge from the US) to ban both, until the unlikely saviour Iran arrived with an emergency postponement.

Now the scientists are pinning their hopes on Belgium, which proposes banning one while allowing countries to make up their own minds on the other. The lobbying, vote bargaining and political jostling are set to begin all over again. "This time most of the focus is on what the Islamic states will do," says Bob Ward of the Royal Society.