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UN delays cloning vote

US speaks out in support of total cloning ban, vote may take place soon | [By Alison McCook](#)

UNITED NATIONS—The legal committee of the UN's General Assembly concluded the year's [second day of debating](#) whether to ban human cloning on Friday (October 22) without taking a vote, leaving the issue to percolate further in the minds of the deeply divided—and still undecided—member states.

On Friday, Susan Moore, the US Special Advisor, addressed the committee and reiterated the country's position in favor of the total cloning ban. Therapeutic cloning turns "nascent human life into a resource or commodity to be mined and exploited, eroding the sense of worth and dignity of the individual," she said. "For this reason, a partial ban that prohibits reproductive cloning but permits therapeutic, research, or experimental cloning is unacceptable to the United States and many other countries."

The UN has been [trying to reach agreement](#) on a [convention](#) for [more than 2 years](#). On Thursday (October 21), UN Secretary General Kofi Annan [announced](#) that he supports the use of cloning in therapeutic research, opposing the United States and more than 60 other member states that currently support a resolution proposed by Costa Rica that would ban all forms of cloning.

Some 20-odd member states have said they support a separate resolution, put forth by Belgium, which recommends a ban on human reproductive cloning and leaves the decision about therapeutic cloning up to individual states. Under this proposal, members have the option of a total ban, a moratorium on therapeutic cloning, or regulated use of the practice under legislative controls. Technically, either Belgium or Costa Rica can request a vote on their proposals anytime.

Bernard Siegel, executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute, an organization that opposes reproductive but supports therapeutic cloning, told *The Scientist* he was pleased no vote was taken, given that in previous years, a majority of delegates appeared to support a total cloning ban. The longer the committee waits to vote, the more time scientists have to prove the potential of therapeutic cloning, he said. "Time gives an opportunity to educate."

Moreover, Siegel said he believed that opinion was slowly shifting away from a total cloning ban. For instance, some African nations that previously appeared to support the

total ban now appear to have changed their minds. "There's an erosion of support [for the total ban]," Siegel said.

Siegel said he believed some UN member states were closely watching the results of the upcoming US election, given that the US has a strong influence, and President George W. Bush's opponent, John Kerry, supports therapeutic cloning. "If Kerry wins, they will feel less inclined to vote the way of the Bush administration," he said.

But a source at the US mission to the UN told *The Scientist* that any vote that takes place before 2005 would be unaffected by the outcome of November's election, given that John Kerry would not take office until January: "Our position has remained the same for the past 3 years. And we are ready to vote on the resolution."

Links for this article

A. McCook. "UN cloning vote unlikely today," *The Scientist*, October 22, 2004.

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/news/20041022/03>

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<http://www.biomedcentral.com/news/20021001/05/>

T. Tamkins, "UN delays cloning vote," *The Scientist*, November 7, 2003.

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T. Tamkins, "UN to vote on cloning in a year," *The Scientist*, December 10, 2003.

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/news/20031210/05/>

I. Arieff. "Annan backs stem cells studies, differing with Bush," *Reuters*, October 21, 2004.

<http://www.reuters.com/newsArticle.jhtml?type=healthNews&storyID=6575667>

Genetics Policy Institute

<http://www.genpol.org/>