

# UN cloning vote likely this week

## Member states will decide whether to ban all cloning or postpone action | [By Alison McCook](#)

The legal committee of the United Nations' [General Assembly](#) is likely to take some kind of action on Friday (November 19) on the issue of whether to ban both reproductive and therapeutic cloning or to ban reproductive cloning and allow individual states to decide whether they want to permit therapeutic cloning research, despite the fact that recent negotiations have not resolved the deep divide in the committee.

The final meeting of the year is scheduled for Friday. If a compromise position is not reached before that, member states will vote on whether to ban cloning entirely, or decide if they want to postpone any action. Whether the committee will vote to defer or decide is impossible to predict, Anne Power of the UK mission to the UN told *The Scientist*. "Basically, it's quite close," she said. "It's a wait and see."

The UN has been [trying to reach agreement](#) on a [convention](#) for [more than 2 years](#). Currently, the 191 member states are split between two resolutions. The first, put forth by Costa Rica and supported by 60-odd other states, including the United States, proposes a total ban on all forms of cloning. Another resolution submitted by Belgium and supported by the United Kingdom, China, Finland, and others 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.

Since the legal committee revisited the issue [in October](#), Belgium has been meeting with other countries to try to bridge the current divide, Marc Pecsteen, legal advisor of the UN's Belgian mission, told *The Scientist*. For instance, states discussed the option of drafting a declaration, rather than a convention, he said. A declaration is not legally binding, Pecsteen explained, and can contain "ambiguous" language that leaves the issue open to interpretation by individual countries.

However, by yesterday (November 16), countries had made little progress toward agreeing on a declaration, Power said. "We're not going to get that," she noted. "There will be a vote on Friday."

The outcome of that vote, however, remains very unclear. Although the Costa Rican proposal currently has more co-sponsors than the Belgian proposal, around half of the member states have not yet announced which resolution they support, a US official told *The Scientist*. "As far as an expected outcome, I have no idea," the official said.

Even if the General Assembly's legal committee votes to ban all cloning on Friday, the General Assembly has to approve this recommendation before it becomes law, noted Bernard Siegel, executive director of the [Genetics Policy Institute](#), an organization that opposes reproductive cloning but supports therapeutic cloning. Although the General Assembly typically follows the advice of its legal committee, last year, when the legal committee tried to postpone a decision on cloning for 2 years, the General Assembly shortened the timeframe to 1 year, Siegel told *The Scientist*, suggesting they might once again reconsider any decision the legal committee makes.

Links for this article

United Nations General Assembly 59th Session

<http://www.un.org/ga/59/>

C. Soares, "UN cloning talks bog down," *The Scientist*, October 1, 2002.

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

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

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/news/20031107/08/>

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

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

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

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

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