

U.N. Group Calls For Cloning Ban

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(Photo: AP)

(AP) A bitterly divided U.N. committee approved a resolution calling on nations to ban all forms of human cloning which were incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life.

But supporters of stem cell research said they will not be bound by the declaration, calling the language vague and expressing concern that it could be interpreted to ban all forms of cloning, including stem cell research.

QUOTE

"This is the best compromise you are going to find. It's an important word, I can see that."

Stagno Ugarte
Costa Rica Ambassador

The 71-35 vote Friday with 43 abstentions reflected the divisions among the 191 U.N. member states over the cloning issue.

Islamic countries announced in advance that they would abstain because there was no consensus on the text.

The resolution now goes to the U.N. General Assembly for a final vote. If approved, the resolution would only be a recommendation, not a legal requirement.

The United Nations [abandoned efforts last year](#) to agree on a legally binding treaty on cloning because members could not decide whether to ban all human cloning, or to ban reproductive cloning and allow stem cell and other research, which many scientists believe may lead to new treatments for diseases.

The General Assembly last November decided to seek a nonbinding political declaration instead of a treaty, but the same division remained.

Both sides seemed to call the declaration a victory. U.S. State Department spokesman Adam Ereli said the United States was still pleased.

"It's our long-standing position that all human cloning is wrong, and we are proud of our efforts to prevent human cloning," he said. "So the fact that there isn't any action by the U.N. to endorse cloning is a moderate success."

More recently, the assembly's legal committee approved a text drafted by the chairman of a working group that spent much of this week trying to forge a consensus, Morocco's U.N. Ambassador Mohamed Bennouna.

The resolution adopted late Friday calls on member states to quickly implement legislation "to prohibit all forms of human cloning in as much as they are incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life."

It also calls on countries "to adopt the measures necessary to prohibit the application of genetic engineering techniques that may be contrary to human dignity."

After the vote, many countries expressed regret that it was not possible to reach agreement by consensus.

Those against the resolution, led by Belgium, said it would lack clout because it had to be put to a vote. But those in favor, including the United States, called it a victory.

"We're obviously very pleased," said Richard Grenell, spokesman for the U.S. mission to the United Nations. "This means that the United Nations is stating very clearly that member states should adopt legislation outlining all cloning practices."

Costa Rica's U.N. Ambassador Bruno Stagno, who has led the fight for a total cloning ban, said: "We reaffirmed protection of human life as a principle on which you can make no compromises ... When we speak about the protection of human life in this case, we are speaking about the most vulnerable, that is the embryo."

He said scientists conducting stem cell research were purposely creating human life in order to destroy it for research, and that was not compatible with respecting human dignity.

The Vatican, a U.N. observer, was also heartened by what it saw as a victory. "We congratulate the important majority which stated its unequivocal willingness to protect human life," said the Holy See's observer.

But South Korea's representative, part of a group of at least 20 nations who favor therapeutic cloning, said human life means different things to different cultures and religions. He said it should be up to member states to decide their own laws on therapeutic cloning.

Britain's U.N. Ambassador Emyr Jones Parry said his country voted against the resolution and would continue to permit therapeutic cloning research "because of the hope it offers of new treatments to benefit millions of people and their families."

"This is a weak, non-binding political statement," he said. "The number of states that failed to support it is greater than the number that backed it."

Belgium has led the bloc favoring therapeutic cloning. Its representative, Marc Pecsteen, said: "Belgium doesn't feel bound by this declaration and doesn't intend to call into question its legislation in this area."

Sweden also voted against the resolution and said it did not feel bound by it. China voted "no" and criticized the resolution's language as "vague." The Netherlands, another opponent, said it considered the document did not ban therapeutic cloning.

Singapore's U.N. Ambassador Vanu Gopala Menon said his country voted against the resolution because it "does not capture the diversity of views which have been expressed on this important issue."

"Instead, it seeks to impose a single set of values and beliefs upon the international community," he said.

Bernard Siegel, executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute, which supports cloning for research, said after the vote: "There is no consensus and therapeutic cloning will proceed full steam ahead ... We're heartened by that."

By Leyla Linton

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