



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-THIRD WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY  
Provisional agenda item 12.12

A53/15  
10 May 2000

---

## Cloning in human health

### Report by the Director-General

1. The world is poised at the start of an unprecedented genomic revolution that will transform knowledge about medicine and health and create new opportunities for prevention, diagnosis and treatment. Since 1997 WHO has been actively engaged in assessing the ethical and social dimensions of developments in biotechnology and genetics as they affect human health. Cloning has in particular received a great deal of attention, and interest in the subject on the part of Member States resulted in Health Assembly resolutions WHA50.37 and WHA51.10.

2. The pace of change illustrates the need to address – proactively and simultaneously – the scientific and ethical consequences of this revolution to ensure that it leads to improved health for all. Furthermore, in order to be able to contribute to the international discussion and support national governments, the Director-General believes that the time is now ripe to broaden and expand the role of the Organization in these fields from a focus primarily on cloning and related issues to a series of strategic activities encompassing the field of bioethics as a whole.

3. The Director-General sees these new activities as supplementing the work of UNESCO and the Council of Europe, among others, who have for some years admirably taken the lead on promoting international work on bioethical issues. There remains a clear need for the health dimension to receive special attention, and for the sharing of knowledge and views among Member States to be increased and better structured.

4. Discussions at the Fifty-second World Health Assembly and at the 105th session of the Executive Board confirmed that there is widespread support among Member States for such a series of strategic activities in bioethics.<sup>1</sup> These expressions of interest reinforced the conclusions of several recent technical documents reflecting expert opinion upon which the Organization called in pursuit of its work in related areas, as requested in the above-mentioned resolutions.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See documents WHA52/1999/REC/3, summary record of Committee A, ninth and tenth meetings; EB105/2000/REC/2, summary record of the ninth meeting (in print).

<sup>2</sup> Proposed international guidelines on ethical issues in medical genetics and genetic services: report of the WHO meeting on Ethical Issues in Medical Genetics, Geneva, 15-16 December 1997, document WHO/HGN/GL/ETH/98.1; Report of the informal consultation on Ethical Issues in Genetics, Cloning and Biotechnology: Possible Future Directions for WHO, Annex 1. Daar A, Mattei J-F. “Medical genetics and biotechnology: implications for public health”, document WHO/EIP/GPE/00.1.

5. The Director-General understands, however, that in many cases the appropriate mechanisms necessary to stimulate and carry out such an increased level of international dialogue and interchange on bioethics still need to be developed, in further consultation with Member States. Ways to increase the level of WHO's activity in these fields within the constraints of the current funding base also need consideration. These questions will require substantive and sustained reflection during the coming months, with a view to presenting a more concrete set of proposals to the Fifty-fourth World Health Assembly.

= = =