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UN proposes cloning compromise

New declaration asks states to respect "human dignity," doesn't explicitly ban therapeutic cloning | [By Alison McCook](#)

UNITED NATIONS—After years of trying to [hammer out a resolution](#) on human cloning, the legal committee of the United Nations [General Assembly](#) on Friday (November 19) considered the possibility of a non-binding declaration that asks member states to prohibit reproductive cloning and adopt legislation to respect "human dignity."

The UN has been [trying to reach agreement](#) on a [stance on cloning](#) for [more than 2 years](#), during which time the 191 member states were split between two resolutions. The first, put forth by Costa Rica, proposed a total ban on all forms of cloning. Another submitted by Belgium recommended a ban on human reproductive cloning and left the decision about therapeutic cloning up to individual states.

The newest proposal, submitted by Italy, emerged from last-minute negotiations between the two sides of disagreement. "A text has emerged which seems to have a broad support of the member states," the Italian representative told the committee.

The chairman of the legal committee, Mohamed Bennouna, has now established a working group to meet in February to finalize the text of the cloning declaration. The legal committee will reconvene on the afternoon of February 18, 2005 to "consider and take action" on the declaration, Bennouna said.

Bruno Stagno, the ambassador for Costa Rica, told *The Scientist* the latest proposal emerged from a "series of texts" passed back and forth between Costa Rica and Belgium. He added that some countries that supported the initial proposal from Belgium may try to alter the text of the Italian proposal to reduce its impact. But as it stands, the language is clear, he noted. "The way we read that [declaration]... is that what it is doing is prohibiting the creating of human life via cloning," Stagno said.

Although the proposed declaration does not explicitly call on countries to ban therapeutic cloning, no country can argue that it is possible to conduct these experiments while preserving human dignity, Stagno said. "You really can't have it both ways," he said.

However the declaration, if adopted and approved by the General Assembly, would not be

legally binding, so there would be no legal penalties for countries that do not implement relevant legislation.

Because of this, Bernard Siegel, executive director of the [Genetics Policy Institute](#), said he thought Friday's events proved "very good" for those who support stem cell research. "Countries do not have to heed a declaration, and they can do what they choose regarding this research," he told *The Scientist*. "Ultimately, the Belgian proposal is going to be what prevails."

Links for this article

A. McCook, "UN cloning vote likely this week," *The Scientist*, November 17, 2004.

<http://www.biomedcentral.com/news/20041117/02/>

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/>

Genetics Policy Institute

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