

US gets cloning ban victory at UN

UNITED NATIONS: A deeply divided UN General Assembly on Tuesday passed a declaration urging governments to ban all human cloning, including for medical research, in a political victory for the United States.

Several nations immediately vowed to disregard the non-binding statement, which was approved in a 84-34 vote with 37 abstentions after four years of often bitter debate about the meaning of human life.

All 191 UN member nations agreed that cloning should be banned for the purposes of producing adult copies of human beings, but there has been sharp disagreement over the validity of so-called therapeutic cloning. Many scientists say therapeutic cloning – in which embryos are cloned to produce stem cells for medical research before the embryos are later destroyed – could help find a cure for diseases such as Alzheimer's and cancer.

The US administration of President George Bush, however, argued that such research ultimately entails the destruction of human life and should also be outlawed.

Washington helped lead opposition to a declaration that would have come out against reproductive cloning while leaving the question of cloning for medical research up to individual nations.

With many Islamic countries abstaining for lack of a consensus on the issue, the non-binding declaration was approved – just as it did when brought up before a UN committee last month.

China, Belgium and key US ally Britain immediately indicated that the assembly decision would not change their position in favour of cloning for medical research.

Without naming the US, Britain's UN ambassador Emyr Jones Parry lashed out at the "intransigence of those who are not prepared to recognise that other sovereign states" might support cloning for medical research. He called the UN statement "an ambiguous declaration which may sow confusion about the acceptability of this important field of research."

Advocates of stem-cell research said the UN decision would not stop the research and had simply succeeded in blocking a consensus ban on cloning for the purposes of copying adult human beings.

"Rather than banning outright reproductive cloning, the stem cell research foes preferred to play ideological word games at the expense of millions of suffering adults and children praying for cures," said Bernard Siegel, executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute.

"Therapeutic cloning research will not be impeded in the least," Siegel said. afp

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