

MEDIA RELEASE

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International Coalition Created to Defend Bans on Designer Babies

Today, a new and growing international coalition (1) of civil society organisations, human rights activists and academics launched a declaration opposing efforts by a group of irresponsible scientists to overturn the existing legal bans and prohibitions on heritable Human Genetic Modification (HGM). As the Third International Summit on Human Genome Editing (2) begins in London UK, the Coalition calls on policymakers and scientists to respect the strong international consensus, which has existed since the 1990s, for banning HGM and cloning (3). The coalition opposes the undemocratic process through which a small number of scientists, through scientific elite organisations, are trying to make policy for the whole of humanity.

Dr Daniel Papillon, speaking on behalf of the coalition said: “There is no unmet medical need for this technology, but the risks are immense. Firstly, non-consenting genetically modified children and their descendants, will be exposed to risks which will never be fully eliminated. Secondly, HGM would be disastrous for society as a whole. It would increase ableism and entrench social inequality. Eugenic ideas and practices have never disappeared in our society and HGM is its latest high-tech version. Allowing HGM would be an act of extreme scientific irresponsibility. It must be stopped.”

“We invite people and organisations worldwide to join us in our demands, sign our declaration and ask political leaders to put a stop to this dangerous endeavour. Science has improved the lives of all of us but it needs to act inside an ethical and political framework that counters discrimination and promotes social justice for all.”

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The following coalition members will be present at the summit and will be available for interview:

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Notes for editors

1. The International Coalition to Stop Designer Babies is a new grouping of civil society groups, scientists, leading academics and concerned citizens. The declaration, its current signatories and signature form can be found at <https://coalitionstopdesignerbabies.net/>. It is not a one-off declaration for this summit, but an ongoing initiative seeking to resist scientists' efforts to impose HGM.

2.

3. Over 70 countries prohibit heritable genetic modification. (<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/crispr.2020.0082>), including nearly all European countries through the 1997 Council of Europe Convention on Biomedicine and Human Rights. HGM, cloning and eugenics are amongst the very few specific practices (including slavery, etc) outlawed in human rights treaties and declarations. In fact, the entire international human rights framework, beginning with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, arose from the experience of eugenics and other scientific and medical abuses in the first half of the 20th century. The 1998 UNESCO International Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights refers to cloning and HGM as practices contrary to human dignity.