
Super viruses - Not an issue for the German government; German Chancellery blocks public debate but German Parliament is starting discussions

Munich/Berlin 7. November, 2012. A request by the NGOs Testbiotech and Gene-ethical Network (GeN) to initiate public discussion on research with high risk-related flu viruses has been rejected by the German Chancellery. Both organisations wanted Angela Merkel to speak out against the creation of new variations of the bird flu virus (H5N1) and endorse limited access to genetic data. Although the petition contained 250 signatures, the Chancellery refused acceptance and any direct dialogue on this matter. The petition will now be handed over to the research committee of German Parliament during a public expert hearing today.

Christof Potthof from Gene-ethical Network, one of the organisations participating in hearing, has criticised the reaction of the Chancellery. "We are surprised at the way in which the German Chancellor is dealing with this issue. The German government is highly supportive of biotechnology. However, civil society must have a say in research with such a high potential for misuse. This discussion will become more urgent in future because more and more laboratories will be synthesising DNA."

The Gene-ethical Network and Testbiotech are requesting more controls for laboratories synthesising DNA artificially. Furthermore, a transparent and democratically legitimated process has to be established for decision- making in this kind of high-risk research and deciding who will have access to relevant data.

A publication showing that scientists have been able to manufacture an H5N1 type virus in the laboratory, which might be dangerous for mammals prompted both organisations to act. A group of US government advisors proposed that not all the DNA of these viruses should be published. The researchers agreed on 20 January 2012 to a moratorium in order to give the public an opportunity to take up a position on this issue. In reaction, Testbiotech and GeN attempted to call on Chancellor Merkel to issue a public statement which would create a broader public debate.

Link to the petition to the German Chancellor: <http://www.testbiotech.de/en/node/624> [1]

A written statement for the expert hearing in the German Parliament can be found at www.gen-ethisches-netzwerk.de [2].

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URL:<https://www.testbiotech.org/en/news/super-viruses-not-issue-german-government-german-chancellery-blocks-public-debate-german>

Links

[1] <http://www.testbiotech.de/en/node/624> [2] <http://www.gen-ethisches-netzwerk.de> [3] <mailto:christof.potthof@gen-ethisches-netzwerk.de> [4] <mailto:info@testbiotech.org>