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Media Release

Opposition against European Patent on chimpanzees genetically manipulated to develop cancer

Australian company Bionomics holds patent on human genes and genetically engineered great apes

Munich, 30 April 2014. Almost a dozen organisations have filed a joint opposition against a European Patent (EP1364025) granted to the Australian company Bionomics. The company is claiming human genes that have a link to cancer as its invention. According to the patent, the human DNA will be used to genetically engineer chimpanzees and other animal species such as pigs, sheeps, cats and dogs. Consequently, these animals may have a higher risk of developing cancer and will be used in animal experiments. Bionomics already holds three other European Patents on chimpanzees; further patent applications have already been filed. The Albert Schweitzer Stiftung für unsere Mitwelt, Deutscher Tierschutzbund, Gen-ethisches Netzwerk (GeN), Gesellschaft für ökologische Forschung, Jane Goodall Institute - Germany, Kein Patent auf Leben!, Menschen für Tierrechte - Bundesverband der Tierversuchsgegner, Schweizerische Arbeitsgruppe Gentechnologie (SAG), TASSO e.V., Testbiotech und die Wild Chimpanzee Foundation, Germany (WCF) are all involved in the opposition. The opposition is supported by 15500 signatures.

“40 years ago an initial publication showed that it was possible to genetically engineer mammals. Since then the number of these animals used in laboratory experiments has continued to rise. In 2012, in Germany the number of animals used in experiments in field of biotechnology reached nearly one million. Furthermore, around 1500 European patents have been granted on genetically engineered animals thereby providing a commercial incentive to perform more and more experiments. It is time for a change. These patents have to be stopped. We are calling for animals to be treated with respect. This is especially relevant for great apes which exhibit evidence of consciousness akin to that of humans”, Christoph Then says for Testbiotech.

In 2013, the opponents wrote a letter to the investors of Bionomics – so far there has been no response. In the letter sent to HSBC Bank, UBS, JP Morgan, Citicorp und BNP Paribas and others, the organisations call upon the investors to make sure that clear ethical standards are in place.

Furthermore, three other oppositions have already been filed against other European patents on chimpanzees granted to Intrexon und Altor (US). Meanwhile these companies have sent written comments and want to protect their patent claims. This means that a public hearing at the European Patent Office is likely to be held in future.

The opposition also targets the claims on human genes that were isolated from the human body. The US Supreme Court recently stopped such patents because of concerns that these were simply discoveries, but European Patent Office continues to grant them.

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Text of the opposition: www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1034

Patent as granted: www.testbiotech.de/node/877

Click here for online signatures against patents on chimpanzees:
www.testbiotech.org/en/sign_chimpanzees

Click here for online signatures for letters to the investors:
http://www.testbiotech.org/en/investors_chimpanzees

The Great Ape Project: www.greatapeproject.de/

Further information about organisations involved:

albert-schweitzer-stiftung.de

www.gen-ethisches-netzwerk.de

www.gentechnologie.ch

www.janegoodall.de

www.keinpatent.de

www.oekologische-forschung.de

www.tasso.net

www.tierschutzbund.de

www.tierrechte.de

www.testbiotech.org

www.wildchimps.org

First publication on genetic engineering, published April 1974:

www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC388203/pdf/pnas00057-0244.pdf