

AAAS Science and Human Rights Program

Human Rights Day - 2007

“Rights and Responsibilities: Scientific Associations and International Human Rights Norms”

December 10, 2007

Good afternoon and welcome. On behalf of AAAS and the Science and Human Rights Program, thank you for joining us for this year’s event commemorating the anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- the founding document in international human rights law. My name is Mona Younis and I am the Director of the AAAS Science and Human Rights Program.

For over three decades, the Program has been an innovative force in applying the tools and knowledge of science to the benefit of human rights. This year, to better respond to human rights challenges, we are accelerating our efforts by:

- engaging individual scientists and scientific associations in human rights;
- applying new scientific tools and technologies to human rights problems;
- promoting Article 15 -- the human right to benefit from scientific progress -- of the International Covenant on ESC rights; and
- bringing human rights norms to the conduct of science.

U.S. scientists have a long history of engaging in human rights advocacy, specifically on behalf of persecuted colleagues, particularly in the former Soviet Union. At the end of the Cold War, however, U.S. scientists appeared to demobilize. A *Science* magazine article on October 9, 1998 reported: “Human Rights Fades as a Cause for Scientists.” Quote: “[A]fter decades of raucous agitation on behalf of Soviet dissidents during the Cold War...[m]any organizations have seen scientist interest in human rights slip into a long-term decline ...”

Today, a decade after that article was written, we can say honestly that not only has the decline been reversed, but interest has expanded into new directions. While resuming their energetic protests of the suppression and detention of scientists and scholars around the world, U.S. scientists are now also calling attention to our government’s human rights obligations and examining the implications of human rights norms and standards for the conduct of their professions. In a moment we will hear from our distinguished panelists on why scientists and scientific societies should be concerned about international human rights norms and standards, and the rights and responsibilities that emanate from these.

Immediately following the symposium we will break for half an hour to carry on the conversation over refreshments. After that we will move to a working meeting and another room: Revelle Conference Room down the hall. We hope you will join us for the working meeting and help us turn what we learn from our panelists into concrete action -- suggestions for the Science and Human Rights Program’s efforts to bring human rights to the conduct of science in 2008 -- the 60th anniversary of UDHR.

Now it is my pleasure to introduce our moderator -- Dr. Al Teich, Director of AAAS Science & Policy Programs, which includes science and human rights.