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“Basel meets Berlin” – transparency is needed for animal experiments

Berlin, 18 October 2011

The new EU Directive on animal experiments, parts of which were modeled on Swiss legislation in 2010, has to be implemented in all EU Member States by the end of 2012. The signers of the Basel Declaration are calling for uniform rules and the highest standards to be applied in the enactment of this directive as this is essential for raising public acceptance and understanding for animal research.

Improving the acceptance and understanding for animal research among the general public and politicians was the aim of more than 80 international researchers who gathered in Berlin from 16 to 18 October. This meeting was occasioned by the enactment of the new EU Directive on animal experiments into national law. The scientists formed working groups to develop concrete approaches to improving animal welfare. A further core aspect of the meeting was the demand for transparency, i.e. for comprehensible communication with the general public and politicians. The researchers presented their results to the public in the Swiss embassy, together with representatives of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Swiss Federal Veterinary Office, and announced the establishment of a new international society.

A year ago, researchers adopted the Basel Declaration, a call for more trust and transparency in animal research. The declaration has so far been signed by over 800 scientists from all over the world and, like the Declaration of Helsinki¹, it should serve in the future as a global ethical framework within the field of animal experimentation. October 2011 saw the founding of the international Basel Declaration Society. This society will administer the declaration and promote its ongoing development (www.basel-declaration.org).

In Berlin, the progress made over the last year and the possibilities of further improving animal welfare and communication were discussed. “A year ago we were asked how a piece of paper was supposed to change practices – today we can show that the declaration is a living commitment” said Prof. Michael Hengartner from Zurich when he opened the event and presented the first annual report of the Basel Declaration. “We are open to dialogue with everyone who wants to join forces with us on improving animal welfare”, explained Prof. Stefan Treue, Director of Germany’s Primate Center, pointing out that in Berlin animal welfare organizations were invited to the conference discussions for the first time.

Just how difficult it is to address the issue of “animal experiments” politically in Europe was explained by MEP Elisabeth Jeggle (CDU), rapporteur to the European Parliament during the revision of the EU Directive. She urged the governments of the EU Member States to enact the difficult Brussels compromise into national law

¹ The Declaration of Helsinki is the successor to the Nuremberg Code, which formulated ethical guidelines for research in humans after the Nuremberg trials of Nazi doctors.

quickly. Susanna Louhimies, expert from the Environment Directorate-General of the European Commission, called on researchers and animal rights activists to view the new legislation not as a threat but as an opportunity to work together on improving animal welfare.

The individual results of the conference discussions together with more background information on the Basel Declaration Society and its activities can be found at www.basel-declaration.org. For any further questions, discussions with scientists or guided tours of laboratories, please do not hesitate to contact our press office at presse@basler-konferenz.de.

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