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WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION STATEMENT ON ANIMAL USE IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

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Preamble

Biomedical research is essential to the health and well-being of every person in our society. Advances in biomedical research have dramatically improved the quality and prolonged the duration of life everywhere in the world. However, the ability of the scientific community to continue its efforts to improve personal and public health is being threatened by a movement to eliminate the use of animals in biomedical research. This movement is spearheaded by groups of radical animal rights activists whose views are far outside mainstream public attitudes and whose tactics range from sophisticated lobbying, fund raising, propaganda and misinformation campaigns to violent attacks on biomedical research facilities and individual scientists.

The magnitude of violent animal rights activities is staggering. In the United States alone, since 1980, animal rights groups have staged more than 29 raids on U.S. research facilities, stealing over 2,000 animals, causing more than 7 million dollars in physical damages and ruining years of scientific research in the process. Animal activist groups have engaged in similar activities in Great Britain, Western Europe, Canada and Australia. Various groups in these countries have claimed responsibility for the bombing of cars, institutions, stores, and the private homes of researchers.

Animal rights violence has had a chilling effect on the scientific community internationally. Scientists, research organizations, and universities have been intimidated into altering or even terminating important research efforts that depend on the use of animals. Laboratories have been forced to divert thousands of research dollars for the purchase of sophisticated security equipment. Young people who might otherwise pursue a career in biomedical research are turning their sights to alternative professions.

Despite the efforts of many groups striving to protect biomedical research from animal activism, the response to the animal rights movement has been fragmented, underfunded, and primarily defensive. Many groups within the biomedical community are hesitant to take a public stand about animal activism because of fear of reprisal. As a result, the research establishment has been backed into a defensive posture. Its motivations are questioned, and the need for using animals in research is repeatedly challenged.

While research involving animals is necessary to enhance the medical care of all persons, we recognize also that humane treatment of research animals must be ensured. Appropriate training for all research personnel should be prescribed and adequate veterinary care should be available. Experiments must comply with any rules or regulations promulgated to govern human handling, housing, care, treatment and transportation of animals.

International medical and scientific organizations must develop a stronger and more cohesive campaign to counter the growing threat to public health posed by animal activists. Leadership and coordination must be provided.

The World Medical Association therefore affirms the following principles:

1. Animal use in biomedical research is essential for continued medical progress.
2. The WMA Declaration of Helsinki requires that biomedical research involving human subjects should be based on animal experimentation, but also requires that the welfare of animals used for research be respected.
3. Humane treatment of animals used in biomedical research is essential.
4. All research facilities should be required to comply with all guiding principles for humane treatment of animals.
5. Medical Societies should resist any attempt to deny the appropriate use of animals in biomedical research because such denial would compromise patient care.
6. Although rights to free speech should not be compromised, the anarchistic element among animal right activists should be condemned.
7. The use of threats, intimidation, violence, and personal harassment of scientists and their families should be condemned internationally.
8. A maximum coordinated effort from international law enforcement agencies should be sought to protect researchers and research facilities from activities of a terrorist nature.