

Scientists asked to take responsibility for avoiding the misuse of science and technology

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The statement has been signed by over 60 national science academies, including the academies of 21 EU Member States and three candidate countries.

The premise of the statement is that: 'In recent decades, scientific research has created new and unexpected knowledge and technologies that offer unprecedented opportunities to improve human and animal health and environmental conditions. But some science and technology can be used for destructive purposes as well as for constructive purposes.'

The 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention saw each signatory pledge to never develop, produce or stockpile microbial or other biological agents or toxins of types and in quantities that 'have no justification for prophylactic or other peaceful purposes'.

Unfortunately, the threat of biological weapons has once again become a reality, and the IAP statement is intended as a guide to individual scientists and local scientific communities who may wish to draw up their own code of conduct. It addresses five fundamental issues: awareness; safety and security; education and information; accountability; and oversight.

Under the heading of 'Awareness', the statement emphasises that scientists should always take into consideration the 'reasonably foreseeable consequences of their own activities'. Scientists must also recognise that 'individual good conscience does not justify ignoring the possible misuse of their scientific endeavour'.

'Safety and Security' refers to the responsibility of using good, safe and secure laboratory procedures, while 'Education and Information' is a reminder that scientists should disseminate and teach information on laws, policies and principles aimed at preventing the misuse of biological research.

Under 'Accountability' the statement asks that scientists who become aware of activities that violate the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, or any international customary law, should raise their concerns with the appropriate people, authorities and agencies.

The final issue addressed by the statement is 'Oversight'. Those overseeing research or the evaluation of projects or publications have a responsibility to promote adherence to the above principles by those under their supervision, concludes the statement.

Last update: 5 December 2005

Permalink: <https://cordis.europa.eu/article/id/24877-scientists-asked-to-take-responsibility-for-avoiding-the-misuse-of-science-and-technology->

European Union, 2025