

## Statement on «Race»

proposed by the participants of the Scientific Workshop of the International UNESCO-Conference «Against Racism, Violence, and Discrimination», June 8 and 9, 1995, Schlaining Castle, Austria. Chairman and organizer: Horst Seidler, University of Vienna.

The revolution in our thinking about population genetics and molecular biology has led to an explosion of knowledge about living organisms. Among the ideas that have been profoundly altered are concepts of human variation. The concept of «*race*» carried over from the past into the 20th century has become entirely obsolete. In spite of this, the concept has been used to justify totally unacceptable violations of human rights. An important step towards preventing such abuse of genetic arguments is to replace the outdated concept of «*race*» with ideas and conclusions based upon current understanding of genetic variation as it applies to human populations.

«*Races*» are traditionally believed to be genetically homogenous and different one from the other. This definition was developed to describe human diversity associated e.g. with various geographical locations. However, recent advances in modern biology based on techniques of molecular genetics and on mathematical models of population genetics have shown this definition to be totally inadequate. Current scientific findings do not support the earlier view that human populations can be classified into discrete «*races*» like «Africans», «Eurasians» (including «Native Americans»), or any greater number of subdivisions.

Specifically, between human populations, including smaller groupings, genetic differences may be detected. These differences tend to increase with geographic distance, but the basic genetic variation between populations is much less prominent. This means that human genetic diversity is only gradual and presents no major discontinuity between populations. Findings supporting this conclusions defy traditional classification of «*races*» and make any typological approach totally inadequate. Furthermore, molecular analysis of genes occurring in different versions (alleles), have shown that within any group the inherited variation among individuals is large, while, in comparison, variation between groups is comparatively small.

It is easy to recognise differences in external appearance (skin colour, morphology of body and face, pigmentation etc.) among people of various parts of the world, but the underlying genetic variation itself is much less prominent. Though it seems paradoxical to acknowledge the existence of conspicuous genetically-determined morphological differences, genetic variations in underlying physiological features and functions are very minor when population means are considered. In other words, perception of morphological differences may erroneously lead us to infer substantial underlying genetic differences.

Evidence indicates that during the course of evolution of modern humans there has been relatively little change in the fundamental genetic constitution of populations. Molecular analysis of genes also strongly suggest that modern humans have only recently expanded into habitable world regions, adapting, in the process, to very different and sometimes extreme environmental conditions (e.g. harsh climates) in a relatively short time span. The necessity to adapt to extreme environmental

differences has only generated changes in a small subset of genes affecting sensitivity towards environmental factors. It is worth mentioning that these adaptations in response to environmental conditions are largely historical and are not consequential for life in modern civilisation. Nevertheless they are construed by some as reflecting substantial differences between groups of people thereby contributing to the concept of «*races*».

According to scientific understanding, therefore, categorization of humans along distribution of genetically determined factors are artificial and encourage the production of unending lists of arbitrary and misleading social perceptions and images. Furthermore, there is no convincing evidence for «*racial*» divergences in intelligent, emotional, motivational or other psychological and behavioural characteristics that are independent of cultural factors. It is well known that certain genetic traits which are beneficial for one life situation may be disadvantageous for another one.

Racism is the belief that human populations differ in heritable traits of social values making certain groups superior or inferior to others. There is no convincing scientific evidence that this belief is warranted. This document asserts that there is no scientifically reliable way to characterise human diversity using the rigid terms of «*racial*» categories or the traditional «*race*» concept. There is no scientific reason to continue using the term «*race*».

The following scientists participated in the workshop and accepted the statement

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