



INTERNATIONAL
UNION OF
MICROBIOLOGICAL
SOCIETIES

IUMS

IUMS Code of Ethics against Misuse of Scientific Knowledge, Research and Resources

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There has always been the potential for dual application of scientific knowledge for beneficial or malicious purpose. However, current societal and geopolitical changes have increased the risk of the misuse of this knowledge. The IUMS reaffirms its major goal is to promote research and the open exchange of scientific information for advancement of the health and welfare of humankind and the environment and strongly discourages any uses of knowledge and resources to the contrary.

IUMS is opposed to the misuse of microbiological knowledge, research and resources. In particular, IUMS also strives to promote ethical conduct of research and training in the areas of biosecurity and biosafety so as to prevent use of microorganisms as biological weapons and therefore to protect the public's health and to promote world peace

Additional information

Objective

IUMS seeks that all its member societies adopt or develop a Code of Ethics to prevent misuse of scientific knowledge and resources.

Background and Rationale

Rapid advances in the biological sciences offer significant benefits to mankind while posing new challenges to the scientific and security communities. Whereas biological research has greatly contributed to the improvement of human health, the same knowledge can also be used to produce potentially dangerous agents and toxins for harmful use. Nevertheless, excellence in scientific research depends on open interactions among researchers, including the exchange of scientific data and methodologies and open access to biological resources.

The objectives of the International Union of Microbiological Societies (IUMS), one of 26 Scientific Unions of the International Council of Science (ICSU), are to: 1) promote the study of microbiological sciences internationally; 2) initiate, facilitate and coordinate research and other scientific activities which involve international cooperation; 3) ensure the discussion and dissemination of the results of international conferences, symposia and meetings and assist in the publication of their reports; 4) represent microbiological sciences in ICSU and maintain contact with other international organizations. Above all the major objective of the IUMS is to constantly advance the knowledge of the microbiological sciences in order to enhance human and animal welfare globally.

The IUMS having 113 member societies and 14 associate members representing well over 100 countries is in a unique position to play a leadership role in promoting responsible stewardship in the biosciences. Specifically IUMS is also in a unique position to provide guidance for avoiding potential abuse of research and resources and specifically to develop educational programs in the area of biosecurity and biosafety that can be offered through member societies and sister Unions.

The science community voluntarily conforms to codes of conduct on issues such as research ethics and professional conduct. Self-regulation has worked well in these and other areas. Many initiatives are underway in many different countries to apply a self-regulatory approach in the context of balancing scientific freedom and biosecurity. The augmentation of existing regulatory frameworks with self-regulation is the approach most likely to succeed. It was within this spirit that the Executive Board of the International Union of Microbiological Societies reviewed and supported the position statement of the American Society for Microbiology and the recently revised ASM Code of Ethics presented at the meeting of the States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (/Biological) and Toxin Weapons June 16, 2005 in Geneva. It is within this context that the Executive Board in its meeting in 2006 in Istanbul unanimously approved the adoption of the IUMS Code of Ethics to prevent the misuse of scientific knowledge and resources. The Executive Board of the IUMS recommends that each of the member societies of IUMS who do not already have a similar code develops one or adopts the IUMS Code of Ethics to prevent the misuse of scientific knowledge and resources.