

**MEDIA RELEASE
conference**

Attachments: statements from the press

For immediate release, Friday February 23

Stop GM Human Embryos!

Human Genetics Alert (HGA; 1) today called on the government not to allow the creation of genetically modified (GM) human embryos. It is vital that Britain does not become the first country to break the international consensus against human genetic modification (HGM). The government's temporary ban on the the creation of GM 'designer babies' provides no reassurance, since it is clear that the Government's eventual aim is to end the ban. It would be wrong to invest funding in research and to raise hopes of future cures for disease unless the aim was to eventually allow this technology to be used. HGA has therefore launched a campaign today to alert the public to the dangers of the government's plans.

HGA's Director, Dr David King, said: "We must not start down the path to a future of GM 'designer babies'. Do we want a society in which children are nothing but one more consumer commodity, and where the rich can give their children biological advantages over the rest of us?"

"If you don't want GM food, why would you want GM human embryos?"

"We believe the government has been persuaded by a very few entrepreneurial fertility doctors into ignoring the strong majority of public opinion against allowing HGM."

Dr Michael Antoniou, Reader in Molecular Genetics, King's College, said: "As a gene therapist, I am opposed to so-called germ line gene therapy. It is unnecessary, because parents who do not want to pass on genetic diseases can use sperm or egg donation, prenatal diagnosis and abortion, or genetic testing of embryos."

"I am very concerned that permitting genetic modification of human embryos will bring gene therapy into disrepute."

Dr Richard Nicholson, Editor of the Bulletin of Medical Ethics, said: "The rest of Europe has banned the creation of GM babies, and the EU has therefore refused to fund research into genetic modification or cloning of human embryos. Britain should follow suit."

"The steady relaxation of one ethical constraint after another in UK research has produced little of value, while contributing to a growing public mistrust of medical research. Those who fund or undertake research in the UK need to remember that research considered by many to be unethical has never led to any major advance in healthcare."

Notes for editors

1. Human Genetics Alert is an independent watchdog group. We are a progressive secular organisation and support a woman's right to choose.