

MEETING OF MINISTERS AND HIGHER AUTHORITIES OF SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY OF SOUTH AMERICA
RIO DE JANEIRO DECLARATION ON ETHICS IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

We, the Ministers and Higher Authorities of Science and Technology of South America, gathered in Rio de Janeiro on this 4th day of December, 2003, to reflect upon the limits that ethics impose on the production and use of scientific knowledge,

Considering:

the Declaration on the Use of Scientific Knowledge, signed in Budapest in 1999, that placed science in its social and international context as an instrument for the well being of all peoples, and called upon all countries to work for the good of humanity;

the overwhelming process of economic globalization and the growing impact of scientific development and technological innovations on our societies;

that the South American countries represented at this meeting recognize the need in the elaboration of their management policies for scientific and technological development to pay special attention to the ethical implications, so that principles founded upon such policies may serve as guidance for efforts to achieve the well-being of their peoples and their autonomy as nations;

that a more democratic and far-reaching application of this knowledge requires national and regional development projects that include society as a whole;

that such projects must be viewed from the harmonic perspective of our peoples' common international interests, in order to confront the current trends of globalization in the realm of science, technology, economics, politics, and culture;

that the ethical and human conscience that grows at the heart of our societies impels us to prioritize, in the distribution of the benefits of knowledge to all, especially to women and children as well as all facets of excluded and marginalized segments of society, and the production of knowledge by women;

that the principles of democracy and social justice should govern international relations, serving as a reference for fraternity among countries, nations, and peoples;

that democracy, independence, and respect not only for individual and regional differences but also for the right and the struggle for peace, must reflect, within our countries, the same struggle for liberty, respect for human rights and, fundamentally, access for all to the intangible and practical benefits of human knowledge in culture, the arts, science and technology, through education and democratization of the results of economic development;

that we must defend an international system that elects to combat hunger and exclusion, especially exclusion from all forms of knowledge, as the highest priority, promoting universal quality education and that assures the right of all to healthcare, education, and housing while at the same time hinders abuses of power, condemns discrimination, and denounces intolerance and all other conditions or interests that may lead to war and the breakdown of democratic structures;

that free access to scientific knowledge and to effective participation in its creation, as well as the technological development and innovation, allowing the integration of our efforts, especially with respect to the establishment of an effective network of scientific and technological cooperation;

recognizing that the scientific and technological component forms the basis of the so-called "knowledge economy" - the economy of the third millennium - and that improved scientific and technological capacity will allow the participation in this economy and therefore in development; and

Facing limits imposed by international trade rules which, most of the time, do not consider the interests of the developing countries and their populations, and that our countries will also face competition from those countries possessing technology, as well as their transnational companies, the main beneficiaries of so-called "globalization".

Do recommend:

that the foundational activities for science and technology, such as education, scientific research, culture and technological development, be recognized and treated as public goods, and that an effort be made to diffuse knowledge, placing it at the disposal of humanity, especially the communities of the Third World;

that the governments of the Region support UNESCO in its efforts to allow the sectors and activities which constitute the "knowledge economy" (education, science, and culture) to contribute to socio-economic development in order to ensure the effective democratization of the components of knowledge generated by the digital industry and to render more flexible trade practices in the international regime of intellectual property, particularly in public health;



that the governments devote greater attention to the treatment given to science and technology in the context of the international trade rules and negotiations, adopting new critical approaches to the rules in effect and generating innovative proposals that increase access for the countries in the Region to knowledge and its benefits;



that our governments promote and stimulate the dissemination of information and knowledge through significant investments in R&D, information technology, robotics and computer science, software and hardware, popularizing the sources and the means of information as well as promoting universal access for all citizens;

that our governments support the increase in the use and production of software, seeking autonomy and cost reductions for the countries of the region;

that national and regional research groups be established with the objective of studying alternatives for the production of low-cost personal computers, aimed at universalizing usage of such computers, as well as implementing projects for regional cooperation in this field;

Do further recommend:

That attention be given to non-proprietary treatment of software, transmissions, and other digital technologies essential to ensuring the linguistic-cultural diversity of countries with relatively low representation on the Internet as well as in the use of electronic databases;

That an international network of scientific and technological knowledge be created, public in nature and freely accessible, also linked to databases on patents and inventions;

That a fund be established for the promotion of education, science, and culture in cyberspace, in support of networks of public schools, universities and research institutes in the countries of the Region, whose objective would be to promote science in the classroom and its popularization;

that the protection of individual rights and freedoms be promoted in measures relating to the fight against terrorism and to the promotion of a culture of cybersecurity;

that nations work together for the creation of an international consensus for the conversion of a portion of the payment of the external debt of developing countries into national investments in science and technology;

that our governments consider, the development of capacities which allow people to have access to new knowledge that make possible their productive participation in new sectors, if technological change so demands;

that the commitment to create spaces of cooperation in science and technology among our countries be reiterated, in both the public and private sectors, taking into account the ethical, political, social, and economic challenges they face;

that the essential role of the United Nations System's specialized agencies, particularly UNESCO, be recognized in supporting the elaboration of effective policies and guidelines in the field of ethics of Science and Technology and in technical cooperation through the exchange of international specialists, resource mobilization programs for the promotion of integrated interdisciplinary approaches to cooperation for development in science and technology and for the transfer of technological knowledge;

that UNESCO's work in the field of Ethics of Science and Technology and its role as focal point and legitimate participant in the worldwide debate over this issue be recognized and supported;

that the establishment, by UNESCO, of a mechanism that integrates and proposes dialogue on issues related to the Ethics of Science and Technology among our Governments be supported in order to promote the creation of programs for the teaching of ethics in basic, secondary and higher education and teacher training programs in this area; and the establishment of a network of governmental and non-governmental institutions in this area be supported;

that the work of COMEST as an independent advisory body of UNESCO regarding issues of Ethics in Science and Technology be recognized and that participation in this Commission be improved by the continued inclusion of representatives from all continents;

that the recommendations set forth by COMEST in such areas as the teaching of ethics, outer space, energy, and water be examined, in order to reinforce and to incorporate where necessary this ethical reflection in national and regional policies, in strategies, and in projects;

that States, organizations and other institutions interested in promoting and deepening reflection on the ethics of science be encouraged to create national and institutional commissions on scientific ethics;

that States be urged to implement, within the shortest time possible, the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, approved in 1997 at the United Nations General Assembly;

and that the International Declaration on Human Genetic Data, approved at the 32nd UNESCO General Conference, be supported.

Thus, the Ministers and Higher Authorities of Science and Technology of South America, gathered in Rio de Janeiro, request the Heads of State and Government to confirm the growing importance of the ethical dimension of Science and Technology for the promotion of sustainable and equitable development, supporting the strengthening of cooperation in Science and Technology, above all with respect to their ethical implications, among the countries of South America, under the terms of the present Declaration.

The signatories hereby agree to transmit this Declaration to the Secretary General of the United Nations, as well as to the Director-General of UNESCO.

Rio de Janeiro, December 4, 2003

Signatories:

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TULIO DEL BONO - Secretary of Science and Technology of Argentina

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