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Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology

----Quality Life Through Research----

July 20, 2004

Dr. William R. Steiger
Special Assistant to the Secretary for International Affairs
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Dr. Steiger:

We are writing on behalf of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology and the Association of American Medical Colleges to express our concerns about your letter dated April 15th, 2004 to Dr. Denis G. Aitken of the World Health Organization (WHO). In this communication, you announce that the Director of the Office of Global Affairs in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will henceforth determine, in consultation with agency officials, which scientists will be allowed to accept invitations to participate in expert panels of the WHO. You cite as justification U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and U.S. Civil Service regulations that require HHS scientific experts to "advocate U.S. Government policies." The letter is very troubling to us on its face, and we write to seek further understanding of what is intended.

We understand that when federal scientists are asked to participate as official representatives of the U.S. government in the articulation of government *policy*, those scientists are expected to conform to applicable federal policy. However, when they are invited to scientific meetings to share their unique scientific and technical expertise, whether as official representatives of the government or not, and whether here or abroad, the circumstances are entirely different. We seek your assurance that the stance taken in your letter is not intended to interfere with the ability of scientists employed by the federal government to interact with their peers freely on scientific matters, in an environment free of political constraint or distortion.

Further, we ask whether the department's new stance applies only to WHO, and if so, why? Does it cover all requests for technical consultation or service as temporary advisors? What criteria will be applied to determine the suitability of particular federal scientists to serve in these capacities? What consideration has been given to the adverse effect of the inevitable delays that will occur as DHHS makes its

determinations on the ability of the international scientific community to respond briskly to emerging public health crises, e.g., SARS, new strains of virulent flu virus, etc.?

We do not know for how long the cited regulations have been interpreted as you do in your letter, but never in our own long years of service on federal scientific advisory bodies, or those of innumerable colleagues, have we encountered an instance in which we were informed that our scientific opinions and judgments must advocate or conform to particular policies of the U.S. Government.

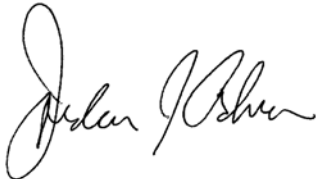
We applaud the Department's many concerted efforts in international health. But, we very strongly believe that open, unfettered scientific communication is essential to victory in the fight against the many daunting health challenges facing our world. Any attempt to limit scientific intercourse or collaboration, or to impose on them political or ideological slants, will only hinder research progress by impairing (or preventing) the participation of some of America's most distinguished scientists in national and international scientific deliberative bodies.

We urgently request at a minimum, clarification, and far better, rethinking of the position articulated in your letter. We have chosen to copy the Secretary in order to be certain that the gravity of our concerns is recognized widely within the department.

Sincerely,



Paul W. Kincade, Ph.D.
President
Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology



Jordan J. Cohen, M.D.
President
Association of American Medical Colleges

Cc: Secretary Thompson