

Call to end the use of non-human primates in biomedical research and testing from animal protection organisations worldwide Berlin, August 2005

Non-human primates are highly intelligent, sentient animals. They form intricate social relationships and they interact with their environment in a highly complex way. They engage in imaginative problem solving and exhibit a range of emotions. In short, they are very close to humans in their biology and capabilities, and the users of non-human primates argue that this makes them ideal 'models' for research. However, this also means that primates are able to suffer like humans and there can be no question that primates have the capacity to experience pain and distress. It is also widely accepted that primates experience a range of negative emotions (e.g. anxiety, apprehension, fear, frustration, boredom and mental stress) as well as a range of positive emotions (e.g. interest, pleasure, happiness and excitement).

Confining animals that would normally live in a very large and complex home range in the laboratory, must have a significant adverse effect on their welfare. At its best laboratory primate housing represents only a small fraction of their home range. The worst, still commonly used in many countries, is a large metal box in which the animals can only take a few steps in any direction. Other aspects of the lifetime experience of laboratory primates also cause stress and suffering, particularly where they cannot control their environment, social grouping, or what is done to them.¹ Any pain or distress associated with experimental procedures is therefore compounded by additional adverse effects resulting from capture of wild primates, breeding practices, transport, housing, husbandry, identification, restraint, and finally, euthanasia.

For these reasons alone², the use of primates in scientific research and testing is a matter of extreme concern to the animal protection community worldwide and to the significant sector of the public who they represent. This concern has been recognised at a regulatory level with some countries making special provisions for primates in their legislation, and emphasising the need to reduce and replace primate experiments³.

Resolution

The animal protection organisations attending the Fifth World Congress on Alternatives and Animal Use in the Life Sciences in Berlin in 2005 have united to call for an end to the use of non-human primates in biomedical research and testing. We urge governments, regulators, industry, scientists and research funders worldwide to accept the need to end primate use as a legitimate and essential goal; to make achieving this goal a high priority; and to work together to facilitate this. In particular, we believe there must be an immediate, internationally co-ordinated effort to define a strategy to achieve the complete replacement of all experiments on non-human primates with humane alternatives.

¹ See for example: The welfare of non-human primates used in research. Report of the Scientific Committee on Animal Health and Welfare, European Commission, Health and Consumer Protection Directorate-General. (2002)

² Some individuals and organisations also put forward scientific arguments to question the validity of some or all experiments on primates.

³ For example, the UK Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; Council Decision, 1989, on the European Convention for the protection of vertebrate animals used for experimental and other scientific purposes, (OJEC, 1999).