
YES to Animal Welfare and NO to a Ban on Animal Research

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The following is a guest piece by [Prof. Michael Hengartner](#) of the [Basel Declaration](#). An organization founded in Germany to promote well-regulated humane research using animals.

THE GOALS OF THE BASEL DECLARATION AND THE BASEL DECLARATION SOCIETY

Animal welfare and scientific and medical progress are not contradictory. More than 800 international researchers have already shown their commitment to accepting greater responsibility in animal experiments by signing the Basel Declaration and supporting the corresponding organization. The Basel Declaration Society aims for a more impartial approach to scientific issues by the general public, and more trusting and reliable cooperation with national and international decision makers.

In November 2010, life science researchers from Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, France and the UK addressed the challenges of animal research and adopted the “Basel Declaration”. This document marks an unprecedented effort by the scientific community to achieve more trust, transparency and communication around animal research. The event was echoed in [international media](#), among them the Scientific American, the Medical Tribune and nature.

“The high quality of medical care today would not have been achieved without research in animal experiments. It is important to inform society about the major significance of research using animal experiments for the health of humans and animals,”

- Prof. Dr. Burkhard Ludewig, Director of the Medical Research Center, Institute of Immunobiology, Kantonsspital St. Gallen, Switzerland.

Signatories to the Basel Declaration commit to accepting greater responsibility in animal experiments. They also sign up to intensive, unprejudiced dialogue with the general public. This dialogue is factual, and focuses on achieving concrete goals. The signatories additionally demand that animal experiments needed to obtain research results remain permitted, now and in the future.

“The Basel Declaration came about not in response to any specific occasion, but as a spontaneous voluntary commitment by the scientific community to the best-possible approach to indispensable animal experiments. We present a picture of our modern animal experiment-based science, the deliberation process, the basic conditions and our approach to the issue of animal experiments and show openly what we do and why,”

- Prof. Dr. Stefan Treue, Director, German Primate Center, Göttingen, Germany.

The goal is to make the Basel Declaration the worldwide ethical guideline on animal research, comparable to the Helsinki Declaration which defines ethical guidance on research into humans.

“Basically we have long regarded the principles behind the Basel Declaration as a matter of course, because no researcher performs animal experiments unnecessarily. The Basel Declaration establishes a platform for us on which we can network internationally in order to demonstrate this to the public more clearly still. The message is evidently getting across: For the first time we are now engaged in sustained dialogue with representatives of critical organizations in a spirit of genuine partnership that bring all sides together more than any extremist slogans do,”

- Prof. Dr. Rolf Zeller, Department of Biomedicine at the University of Basel, Switzerland and first President of the Basel Declaration Society, which was founded in September 2011.



The Basel Declaration Society celebrates its first birthday

SIGN THE BASEL DECLARATION!

“The aim is for as many researchers as possible to learn of our initiative and affiliate themselves with it. We invite all colleagues and the general public to accept this offer of a genuine dialogue and to really live this Basel Declaration,”

- Prof. Dr. Michael Hengartner, Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Institute of Molecular Biology, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Everybody involved in animal research or animal care around the world is asked to sign the [Basel Declaration](#), and to become a member of the Basel Declaration Society. Doing so marks a commitment to strengthen public awareness of the importance of animal models in experimental biomedical research, to foster communication between researchers and the public, and to enhance acceptance of the Basel Declaration.

Animal research is under ever-increasing public and governmental scrutiny, even though its importance for biomedical innovation and the necessity of animal experiments to [further knowledge in basic research](#) are beyond controversy.

Scientists and technical staff conducting animal experiments face increasing public distrust, and often even aggressive rejection. Media covering the topic

frequently lack objectiveness.

This is why already more than 800 international leading scientists have signed the Basel Declaration, to show their conviction that responsible animal research and the sustainable advancement of science and medical progress are compatible.

We hope you will join them with your signature.

BETTER EDUCATION

“Animal experiments will remain necessary in biomedical research for the foreseeable future, but we are constantly working to refine the methods with animal welfare in mind,”

- Prof. Dr. Michael Hengartner, Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Institute of Molecular Biology, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

Advancing the knowledge, implementation and use of [3R principles to reduce, replace and refine animal experiments](#) plays an important role in embedding the Basel Declaration in daily practice. All stakeholders, i.e. everyone engaged in experimental research, the general public and authorities/decision takers, must be made more aware of 3R principles and their current implementation. Moreover, 3R-related issues must be an integral part of scientific publications, and peer reviewers must be better informed about the use, dissemination and quality control of 3R methods. More research is required that captures results in a comprehensive and validated database related to 3R technology and methods.

The [3R principle](#) (replace, reduce, refine) has its origins with William M. S. Russell & Rex L. Burch, who published their “Principles of Humane Experimental Technique” in 1959. These principles are regarded internationally as the guideline for avoiding or reducing animal experiments and the suffering of laboratory animals:

- **Replacement:** replacement of animal experiments by methods that do not involve animals
- **Reduction:** reduction in the number of animals in unavoidable animal experiments
- **Refinement:** improvement in experimental procedures, so that

unavoidable animal experiments

MORE THAN A PIECE OF PAPER

On October 16-18, 2011, more than 80 international life sciences researchers and signatories to the Basel Declaration met in Berlin. Their aim was to continue making a constructive and active contribution to the debate taking place in society. They request that the incorporation of the new EU Directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes into national law by January 2013 happens consistently in all European countries, and to the highest standards – like those in Switzerland.



Animal Welfare is a high priority for scientists

The Swiss severity classification system helps to identify the impact of scientific procedures on the health and well-being of experimental animals. A thorough severity degree classification is essential for improvement in line with the 3R principles. It helps to define humane endpoints in advance, and to assess progress in refinement, project by project. Participants in the Berlin conference recommend the implementation of severity classification systems, and voluntary use of such systems by the scientific community in countries where these are not yet mandatory.

OBLIGATION TO THE PUBLIC

Berlin conference delegates unanimously agreed that science must not only take a clear stand on the responsible handling of laboratory animals, but also has to show greater transparency towards the general public. To make their motivation and methods more comprehensible to the public and decision makers, the researchers committed to cooperate more closely with politicians, the media and schools, and to give greater importance to the communication of science. As a first step they

presented position papers, developed in working groups, to representatives of the European Parliament, the EU Commission and the Federal Swiss Veterinary Office FVO.

The Basel Declaration signatories acknowledge the need for greater discussion of animal experiment issues and also of the risks of research approaches and possible misuse of new technological developments. In addition, they declare their intention to communicate not only results und scientific controversies, but also processes and approval procedures, in order to foster a deeper understanding of research.

“We realize that society funds our research and has a lot of justified questions on the subject of animal experiments and on research in the life sciences. Our aim is to engage in an in-depth, sustained and transparent dialogue. This reduces anxieties and promotes acceptance of views – on both sides,”

- Prof. Dr. Michael Hengartner, Dean of the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Institute of Molecular Biology, University of Zurich, Switzerland.

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