



British Broadcasting Corporation

Press Corps

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Committee: World Health Organization

Topic I: Human Genome and Editing

Human genome editing has always been considered highly controversial, being defined as the process of making changes to a cell or organism's DNA. Whether it is adding, removing, or changing the DNA. Many people consider the technical risks and the ethical concerns of human genome editing—the technical risks being the danger of mutations to the DNA or cells being unable to repair DNA, which can cause all sorts of problems, and the ethical concerns surrounding heritability of permanent errors in the gene pool and the fact that future generations cannot give permission or consent to the alteration of their genome.

During the first committee meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO) delegates, the British Broadcasting Corporation observed delegates deliver speeches on human genome editing. The general consensus was that editing the human genome is revolutionary in healthcare and treatment; however, it is ethically lacking and requires proper supervision and guidelines.

One country stood out: the Federal Republic of Germany. Julian Crabil, the delegation representing the Federal Republic of Germany, stated that the country does not support human genome editing. When asked, he cited the Federal Republic of Germany's negative stance and bans on germline gene editing, as well as its strict rules on somatic gene editing.

On the other hand, delegations representing other countries had different things to say. The delegation representing the Commonwealth of Dominica stated that they support the editing of the human genome; however, because they are not a fully formed nation, they wish to improve their infrastructure before working on complicated topics such as human genome editing.

After the delegates finished their speeches, they divided into four subtopic groups to begin drafting their final resolution. Those four groups discussed guidelines and ethics, the future advancement of human genome editing, asylum and sanctuary from human genome editing, and the prevention of unethical use of it. After drafting their preambulatory and operative clauses, they split into two groups and debated each clause from the perspective of the nation they represented. Again, many of the delegates agreed; however, there were differences in beliefs.

The main issue seemed to be the ethical concerns around affecting the reproductive system, making germline editing one of the most prominent obstacles in reaching consensus. A majority of the representatives did not support germline editing because it affects the hereditary line, which is the main focus of the Seven Generations Theory, as noted by Sophia Prowless, a speaker at the opening ceremony and an indigenous climate educator.

The Seven Generations Theory is a Haudenosaunee philosophy that focuses on how decisions made today will affect the next seven generations, hence the name. The theory applies to environmental, social, and ethical decisions, making its connection to human genome editing crucial. Germline editing can cause deteriorating changes in the gene pool and end up causing more harm than good, whereas somatic editing will only affect the one person.

In the end, the delegates completed their working paper and reached an agreement on how to advance human genome editing for the betterment of society while keeping it controlled from unsafe practices and corruption. As humans, we must not emphasize whims over the health of future generations to come. Human genome editing could truly advance our society by treating genetic diseases and mutations, but only if kept safe and accessible, and the delegates of tomorrow will continue to work toward the goal of accessible and effective healthcare.