



Conference of European Churches
Conférence des Églises européennes
Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen
Конференция Европейских Церквей

Statement of the Conference of European Churches on the recent alleged genome editing in China

Just a few weeks before Christmas (the Christian celebration of the Incarnation) the Chinese scientist Dr He Jankui claimed he had helped to make the first genetically modified babies utilising genome-editing techniques. According to his testimony, he altered the genetic material of embryos to make them resistant to HIV infection.

The result was the birth of twins. Even though this news has not yet been confirmed by the international scientific community the reaction across the world has been one of outrage.

Thematic Reference Group of the Conference of European Churches on Bioethics states:

The recent report that a Chinese scientist claims to have applied genome editing techniques to human embryos, which were subsequently implanted and resulted in the birth of live babies, means that the question of whether- and how- these techniques should be used in humans demands an urgent answer.

In March 2018, the Thematic Reference Group (TRG) of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) on Bioethics produced an in-depth report on this issue, which was presented to the CEC General Assembly in Novi Sad in June 2018. This report can be found here: <https://www.ceceurope.org/bioethics/>

As Christians, we are called on to act justly, to love mercy and to walk in humility. We are called to take a wider perspective on the issues which affect us as individuals and as society, and to care for the most vulnerable in our society, who may not be able to speak for themselves.

As to the way forward, there was considerable disagreement within the TRG: While the majority of the group felt that we should recommend absolute prohibition on the use of genome editing to alter the human germline, some believe that national and international restrictions on the use of genome editing to alter the human germline are sufficient. While strong guidelines are necessary, we would urge that socially just and safe solutions to the environmental, social and health problems being addressed be sought.

We condemn unequivocally the actions and the attitude of the Chinese scientist He Jankui as being profoundly unethical, reflecting a disregard for the ethical and professional concerns of the international scientific community.



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As Churches we refer to the biblical witness which causes us to reflect on the principles behind our thinking and practice:

- ***So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him (Genesis 1,27).***
As Christians, we believe that all human beings are of value in and of themselves and should never be regarded as a means to an end, even if the aim might be described as benign with the intention of serving the good of Humanity.
- ***Paul writes to the Corinthians: "All things are lawful," but not all things are helpful. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up.***
(1st letter to the Corinthians 10,23).

As Christians we are called to discernment regarding our actions towards ourselves, our neighbours, and future generations. One essential biblical principle is alterity; we need the other to enable us to come to wise decisions; therefore, we renew our call for a full and informed international debate on genome-editing.

- ***The apostle Paul writes: "Test everything; hold fast what is good"***
(1st letter to the Thessalonians)

As Christians we believe that we have a responsibility for this world. Together with a great number of scientists and researchers we call for a worldwide moratorium on the use of new genome-editing techniques until scientists, ethicists and the public fully understand the issues surrounding potential breakthroughs.

6 January 2019

By CEC Thematic Reference Group on Bioethics (2013-18):



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