

With the progress of science and technology and with questions arising on globalization, ethical issues - in particular bioethics, concern us all. In response, UNESCO has proposed an institutional framework for collective discussion in the Universal Declarations of 1997¹, 2003² and 2005³. Article 23 of the 2005 Declaration invites all States to encourage NGOs in consultative status with UNESCO to take part in bioethics education and information, bringing closer biomedical and environmental ethics. The International Bioethics Committee (IBC) proposed the following definition of bioethics: "...*the field of systematic, pluralistic and interdisciplinary study that deals with the moral, theoretical and practical questions raised by medicine and the life sciences applied to human beings and to the relationship between humanity and the biosphere*".

Various UNESCO resources have been created, such as the GEObs⁴ data bank and programmes to assist with establishing bioethics committees.⁵ Involvement of NGOs, as representatives of civil society in all its diversity, has been requested.

The Joint Programmatic Commission Science and Ethics (appointed by UNESCO to prepare standard-setting framework and policies) decided to undertake multidisciplinary dialogue on the need for civil society participation in the implementation of bioethical education and training. To this end, various activities have been organized:

- **lectures** by experts in the fields of biology, biomedical science, environmental science, philosophy, law and sociology, informing NGO representatives of new approaches to various subjects, ranging from how the French National Ethics Committee functions and the view of monotheistic religions on status of embryos, to research on global warming in the polar zones, biobanks and nanotechnologies.

- **working sessions** in the Deontology and Bioethics education sub-commissions. This work led to a workshop and a seminar organized at the International Conference of NGOs (Paris, December 2007) that further led to the development of an ethical code of conduct for scientists. The seminar was based on a booklet⁶ (in French and English) that gathered numerous points of view on the subject and was intended to initiate and feed discussions between NGOs.

The next step will be a meeting on 20 November 2008 in Paris. This date, the day before the General NGO Conference, was chosen in order to make it possible for the majority of NGOs to participate and to bring their point of views on the following main questions:

How to teach/educate bioethics?

Who can claim this competence?

How to reconcile cultural identities and universal standards?

Bioethics education for whom?

IFUW, as one of the NGOs with official consultative status with UNESCO, is invited to answer these questions, and to put forward its objectives and priorities. Thanks to its cultural and disciplinary diversity and wide network, IFUW is in an excellent position to contribute towards the expected advances. Special attention will be given to ethical questions related to basic human rights, like health and procreation (woman, mother, child), hygiene, nutrition, environment and sustainable development.

References

- 1-Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, 1997
- 2-International Declaration on Human Genetic Data, 2003
- 3- Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights, 2005
- 4- Global Ethics Observatory- www.unesco.org/shs/ethics/geobs
- 5- Establishing bioethics committees- Guide n°1-UNESCO, 2005
- 6- Bioethics education Booklet prepared for the International Conference of NGOs, 5-7 December 2007- 57 pages –Available in English and French on the Liaison Committee website (www.unesco.org/ngo/comite/cpm-science.htm)

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06 October 2008

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