Committee: World Health Organization (WHO)

Topic: Human Genome Editing

Country: Japan

Delegate: Benjamin Regen

School: Oneness-Family School

Human genome editing has the potential to change our species forever, for good and for bad. Gregor Mendel founded genetics in the 1850s by discovering the rule of heredity ("Playing with genes"). Since then, the field has grown a lot. Sequencing a single genome used to cost millions of dollars, but that cost had dropped to only $1,100 in 2017. While that is still beyond the budget of most, it has made many countries start competing to be the world leader in genomics ("Playing with genes"). The newest gene editing technology, CRISPR-Cas9, makes editing the genome much more efficient. While it has great prospects for curing diseases, it can also change things about future babies such as eye color. Editing future babies is a dangerous gray area ("UN panel"). Japan urges the United Nations to consider the risks and potential benefits associated with human genome research.

The UN established the Expert Advisory Committee on Developing Global Standards for Governance and Oversight of Human Genome Editing in 2018 to develop global standards for human genome editing. They have called for a temporary halt in human genome research, and for a plan to be made among governments about how to proceed with human genome research ("WHO Expert"). However, more work is needed. Japan urges the world to centralize genome editing research, make it affordable for everyone, and mandate disclaimers about the inherent risks of genome technology.

Human genome editing is quite new, so the U.N. hasn't had much time to take action on the topic. However, it has had time to do a few things. With the establishement of the previously mentioned committee on human genome editing the UN called for governments to come together and make a plan about how to handle human genome research in the future, for WHO to create a registry of all of the genome editing research being done, and for WHO to work with patent holders to develop new liscensing agreements and make sure everyone has access to genome editing breakthroughs ("WHO Expert"). It also recommended that WHO establish a group to facilitate global dialogue and develop plans to make sure everyone is included in these conversations ("WHO Expert").

In light of all of this, Japan recommends that all human genome research be centralized to the U.N. This would make research far easier to regulate, as well as giving developing countries a role in it. Currently, developing countries don't have a part in genome research. It is important that everyone has a part of such a revolutionary technology, as exclusion could leave developing countries even farther behind. Governments will be responsible for making sure that no research is being done in their countries without the involvement of WHO, and WHO will be responsible for overseeing the genome research that does get done. The WHO budget will provide the small amount of funding required to hire people to conduct research, as well as people to oversee it.

This solution should result in all genome research being carefully monitored by WHO, which will make sure it is all done ethically and properly. It will keep all research in line with the best interests of humanity.

Next, Japan suggests that genome editing services be taxed for the rich and made more affordable for the poor. This should prevent the growth of income inequality. It is imperative that everyone have equal access to genome technology, as only the rich having access to it would push them farther ahead. Governments around the world will be responsible for applying taxes and cost reductions, and funding for the cost of cuts will come from the taxes imposed on the rich. If it is found to be necessary, the UN budget can contribute to making genome editing more affordable for the poor. As for monitoring, WHO will assign a group of people to periodically check in on who is buying genome technology and how much they are spending in each country. This solution will be successful when the amount of human genome editing being purchased is equal over all countries and income classes. This solution will result in genome technology being equally accessible for everyone.

Finally, Japan proposes that WHO work with governments to mandate disclaimers about the risks associated with all genome services. This is important because the long-term side effects of genome technology are not fully known. It is imperative that anyone who wants to purchase genome technology knows the risks involved, given the vast number of problems that could arise from editing the genome. The responsibility will be on WHO and governments to work together to enforce these disclaimers. To monitor the success of this solution, a group established by WHO will periodically check to make sure that all genome editing products have appropriate disclaimers attatched. Governments will also be on the lookout for products that don't follow disclaimer regulations. If this solution succeeds, all genome editing services on the market will have appropriate disclaimers. Therefore, all consumers of genome technology will know the inherent risks before they partake in it.

In conclusion, the United Nations has already called for a halt to genome research and started working on a plan to continue it ("WHO Expert"). However, more must be done. Japan requests that member states continue to consider the issue of human genome editing. To help move it forward safely, Japan suggests that member states centralize genome research, make it equally available to everyone, and mandate disclaimers for genome services.

Works Cited:

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WHO Expert Advisory Committee on Developing Global Standards for Governance and Oversight of Human Genome Editing. Human Genome Editing: position paper. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.