

## **Super viruses – An issue for the German government?**

Testbiotech and Gen-ethisches Netzwerk are calling for an official opinion

Munich/Berlin, 2. March, 2012. The NGOs Testbiotech and Gen-ethische Netzwerk (GeN) have today published an open letter addressed to the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, calling on her to stop the creation of new variations of the bird flu virus and back limited access to genetic data. Scientists have been able to manufacture an H5N1 type virus in the laboratory, which is extremely dangerous for mammals. The researchers agreed on 20 January 2012 to a moratorium in order to give the public an opportunity to take up a position on this issue. Testbiotech and GeN are now calling on Chancellor Merkel to give an official opinion. Testbiotech and GeN have also published the letter online to collect further signatures till end of June and promote broader discussion within society.

'We need democratic and internationally legitimised mechanisms for managing access to information and handling research. Society must have a say in research with such a high potential for misuse,' says Christof Potthof, at GeN. "As far as the present case is concerned, we are in favour of destroying the new viruses.'

In February the World Health Organisation (WHO) organized an expert panel, which spoke out in favour of an extension of the moratorium. The underlying motivation was to give the public more time to comment on this issue.

In September 2011, Testbiotech handed over around 10,000 signatures to the German Government. The petition advocated inter alia state surveillance of laboratories capable of synthesising genetic material artificially. Testbiotech is now urging for the consequences of the ongoing debate to be addressed:

'Biotechnology has advanced almost unnoticeably in recent years. From a technical point of view, synthesising genotypes of new pathogens is no longer a problem. If research details were to be openly published, other laboratories could manufacture the new viruses. There would be a high potential for misuse,' says Christoph Then, at Testbiotech.

link to the letter to Angela Merkel: <http://www.testbiotech.de/supervirus>

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