

Towards a universal ethical oath for scientists

Session on Code of Conduct for Scientists

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From the Hippocratic Oath to the Russell-Einstein Manifesto

- Hippocrates (ca. 470 b.c)
- Maimonides oath and prayer (end of XII c.)
- Leonardo da Vinci (end of XV c.)
- 20th Century
 - ✓ Canadian "Ritual" for Engineers (1926)
 - ✓ Declaration of Geneva (1948)
 - ✓ Russell-Einstein Manifesto (1955)



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The role of the United Nations

- Dec. 1970 – United Nations Res. 2658 (XXV)
“Role of modern science and technology in the development of nations and the need to strengthen economic, technical and scientific co-operation among States”
- Nov. 1974 – UNESCO 18th General Conference adopts the *“Recommendation on the Status of Scientific Researchers”* calling for:
 - ✓ Scientific researchers’ highly responsible attitude;
 - ✓ Encouragement of spirit of community service;
 - ✓ Development of educational techniques for awakening and stimulating ethical personal qualities and habits of mind;
 - ✓ Reinforcement of scientific researchers’ sense of vocation;
 - ✓ Definition of scientific researcher’s ethical responsibilities and rights.



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The rise of international interest after 1974 (some examples...)

- 1974 *Mount Carmel Declaration on Technology and Moral Responsibility*
- 1984 *Uppsala Code for Scientists*
- 1987 *M.I.T. Biologists Pledge*
- 1987 *Hippocratic Oath for Scientists*
(Nuclear Age Peace Foundation)
- 1988 *Buenos Aires Oath*
- 1991 *Toronto Resolution*
- 1991 *Scientists Pledge not to take part in military-directed research* (SANA, London)



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The UNESCO/ICSU World Conference on Science (1999 WCS)

- Special attention is devoted to the issue of ethical principles and responsibilities in the practice of science
- Joseph Rotblat in his keynote address calls for an ethical code of conduct for scientists formulated as a Hippocratic Oath
- The WCS International Forum of Young Scientists strongly supports the establishment of a scientific Hippocratic Oath
- The final document “Science Agenda – A framework for action” states:
 - ✓ Ethics and responsibility in science should be an integral part of the education and training of all scientists;
 - ✓ Young scientists should be appropriately encouraged to respect and adhere to the basic ethical principles and responsibilities of science;
 - ✓ COMEST and ICSU have a special responsibility to follow up on this issue.



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Report of the Secretary-General Policy Working Group on the UN and Terrorism (2002)

- 11 Sept. 2001 - the terrorist attack against USA adds a specific anti-terrorist concern to the scientific ethics agenda
- October 2001 - UN Secretary-General establishes a "*Policy Working Group on the United Nations and Terrorism*" to identify longer-term implications and broad policy dimensions of terrorism for the United Nations
- 2002 - The Working Group issues a Report with 31 Recommendations



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Report of the Secretary-General Policy Working Group on the UN and Terrorism (2002)

➤ Recommendation 21

“Relevant UN offices should be tasked with producing proposals to reinforce ethical norms, and the creation of codes of conduct for scientists, through international and national scientific societies and institutions that teach sciences or engineering skills related to weapons technologies, should be encouraged.

Such codes of conduct would aim to prevent the involvement of defence scientists or technical experts in terrorist activities and restrict public access to knowledge and expertise on the development, production, stockpiling and use of weapons of mass destruction or related technologies.”



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Report of the Secretary-General Policy Working Group on the UN and Terrorism (2002)

- The UN General Assembly and Security Council endorse the Report and its Recommendations, transmitting it to all the Organizations and Specialized Agencies of the United Nations System
- February 2003 - A UN Inter-Agency Consultative Meeting is held at UNESCO HQs in Paris, to discuss Recommendation 10 (focused on education, tolerance and respect of human dignity) and Recommendation 21 of the Report



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Report of the Secretary-General Policy Working Group on the UN and Terrorism (2002)

- Inter-Agency meeting - General Recommendations:
 - ✓ Encouraging ethical codes of conduct for scientists and engineers
 - ✓ Promoting ethics of science education and awareness
 - ✓ COMEST could play a decisive role in fostering dialogue on education and ethics of science
 - ✓ Involvement of COMEST together with ICSU in the field of the responsibility of scientists

- The ethical task given by the WCS to COMEST and ICSU is recalled and reinforced



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ICSU Standards for Ethics and Responsibility in Science (2001)

- ICSU research
 - ✓ takes into account 115 ethical standards for science (39 international and 23 national)
 - ✓ shows an exponential increase of the number of standards over the years (6 before 1970; more than 40 during last 5 years)



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Examples of existing Oaths or Pledges

An Engineer's Hippocratic Oath

1. *I solemnly pledge myself to consecrate my life to the service of humanity.*
2. *I will give to my teachers the respect and gratitude, which is their due;*
3. *I will be loyal to the profession of engineering and just and generous to its members;*
4. *I will lead my life and practice my profession in uprightness and honor;*
5. *Whatever project I shall undertake, it shall be for the good of mankind to the utmost of my power;*
6. *I will keep far away from wrong, from corruption, and from tempting others to vicious practice;*
7. *(...)*



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Examples of existing Codes

The Cowboy Code ;-)>

1. *The Cowboy must never shoot first, hit a smaller man, or take unfair advantage.*
2. *He must never go back on his word, or a trust confided in him.*
3. *He must always tell the truth.*
4. *He must be gentle with children, the elderly, and animals.*
5. *He must not advocate or possess racially or religiously intolerant ideas.*
6. *He must help people in distress.*
7. *He must be a good worker.*
8. *He must keep himself clean in thought, speech, action, and personal habits.*
9. *He must respect women, parents, and his nations laws.*
10. *The Cowboy is a patriot.*



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ICSU Standards for Ethics and Responsibility in Science (2001)

- Material is classified into 15 categories
 - ✓ oath, pledge, code, guidelines, declaration, principles, appeal, recommendation, manifesto, statement, declaration, resolution, convention, charter, law, others.

- Five cluster groups
 - ✓ Pledge
 - ✓ Guidelines
 - ✓ Statement
 - ✓ Law
 - ✓ Others

- Out of 115 ethical standards, only 6 are oaths and pledges, as an oath is perceived to be of a more binding nature than mere guidelines



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ICSU Standards for Ethics and Responsibility in Science (2001)

- Core traits or virtues related to individual behaviour:

Honesty		Openness		Fairness
Truthfulness		Accuracy		Conscientiousness
Respect		Collaboration		Loyalty

- Core traits or virtues related to the scientific community:

Social responsibility		Environmental responsibility
Sustainable development		Socio-economic development
Social welfare		Socio economic equity
Gender equality		Scientific freedom
Peace		Democratic development
Human rights		



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The Way Forward

➤ Steps:

1. *Request - UNESCO Executive Board (Spring 2004)*
2. *Preliminary Evaluation - 32nd UNESCO General Conference (Fall 2005)*
3. *Mandate for a Declaration including an Oath or Pledge to be ready by Fall 2007*

➤ Questions to be answered:

1. *What kind of code would be feasible?*
2. *The contents*
3. *Consensus building*
4. *Political support*
5. *Strategies of implementation*

