



April 21, 2004

R. Richard Newcomb, Director
Office of Foreign Assets Control
U.S. Department of the Treasury
Treasury Annex
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Mr. Newcomb:

The American Society for Bioethics and Humanities (ASBH) is the nation's largest academic society for professionals engaged in bioethics and medical humanities. Our membership includes approximately 1600 attorneys, chaplains, historians, nurses, philosophers, physicians, professors of literature, social scientists and others.

I write on behalf of ASBH to protest the recent decision to prohibit 60 scientists and professors from traveling to Cuba for a conference on coma and death held in Havana, Cuba from February 24-27, 2004. Some of the affected individuals are members of our organization.

This decision violated the academic freedom of our members, as it interfered with their ability to engage in legitimate, non-political scientific exchange with colleagues from Cuba and elsewhere in the world. Further, although your office had been aware of this conference for six months, the general license was revoked one week before the conference, maximizing the disruption caused.

We understand that the Fourth International Symposium on Coma and Death was attended by 200 researchers from 21 countries. Included on their agenda were reports of new methods for treating patients with serious brain injuries, including experimental data and clinical experience. Legal and cultural perspectives on coma, persistent unconscious states, brain death, and organ donation were discussed. Our members were inappropriately denied an opportunity to engage in these discussions with their colleagues.

We urge you to reconsider and revise the processes that led to this inappropriate and late decision, so as to avoid future interference with the ability of those in our field to participate in international conferences.

Sincerely,

Jonathan D. Moreno, Ph.D.
President, American Society for Bioethics and Humanities

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