

CENTER FOR GENETICS AND SOCIETY



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September 20, 2013

Jean-Claude Mignon
President
Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Via email: jean-claude.mignon@wanadoo.fr; jcmignon@assemblee-nationale.fr

Dear M. Mignon,

We are glad to learn that during the forthcoming PACE Session there will be a lunchtime meeting on October 2 to discuss the possible approval in the United Kingdom of techniques known as “mitochondria replacement,” which would constitute human inheritable genetic modification. We believe that approval by the UK Parliament of a legal “exception” to permit experimentation with these techniques on human subjects would be clinically, ethically and socially dangerous, and would be a breach of international norms. I write to ask that you and your colleagues consider registering your concern and dissent.

My organization, the [Center for Genetics and Society](http://www.geneticsandsociety.org), is a U.S. nonprofit information and public affairs organization working to encourage responsible uses and effective societal governance of human genetic and reproductive technologies. We work in a context of support for the equitable provision of health technologies domestically and internationally; for women's health and reproductive rights; for the protection of our children; for the rights of the disabled; and for precaution in the use of technologies that could alter the fundamental processes of the natural world.

We work with a growing network of scholars, scientists, health professionals, civil society leaders, and others, many of whom have been following developments in the UK with grave concern. We believe that these biologically extreme procedures are inherently unsafe for women undergoing them and for any children who might be born as a result, and that safer alternatives are available for the very few women who would be candidates for their use. Further, and most significantly as a matter of social policy, we are very concerned that such techniques would be used as a door-opening wedge towards full-out germline manipulations, and that they could all too easily put a high-tech eugenic social dynamic into play. Also, as you know, inheritable human genetic modification is prohibited by the Council of Europe's Oviedo Convention on Biomedicine and Human Rights and by other instruments of international law.

Our concerns are spelled out in greater detail in a [commentary](#) I wrote in *Nature* on July 9 of this year, “A slippery slope to human germline modification: The United Kingdom's decision to trial the technique of mitochondrial replacement is premature and ill-conceived.”

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments you may have. Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marcy Darnovsky". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marcy Darnovsky, PhD
Executive Director

Please note that we have [posted this letter](#) on the Center for Genetics and Society's website.