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ISSCR 
International Society for Stem Cell Research

 **EuroStemCell**
European Consortium for Stem Cell Research

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Open letter to President Romano Prodi and Ministers of the Italian Republic

From: Gordon Keller, President, International Society for Stem Cell Research

Co-signatory: Austin Smith, Coordinator, European Consortium for Stem Cell Research

The International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) has become aware of the recent decision of the Italian Minister of Research and University, Fabio Mussi, to withdraw Italy's signature from an 'Ethical Declaration against Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research', which was placed by the previous government in the European Union (*).

While having no direct impact on the current Italian legislation (**), this decision removes a significant barrier to the freedom of scientific research and medical advancement in the European Union.

We as a society, endorse Minister Mussi and the stance of the new Government of Italy on this issue. The withdrawal from the Ethical Declaration is consistent with the opinion of the European Group on Ethics (***) and is of great importance for citizens in those European countries that have come to democratic decisions that research on human embryonic stem cells is necessary, legitimate and ethical.

Europe has made major historical contributions in the field of fundamental stem cell research and is well-positioned to translate this knowledge to the clinic and develop future treatments for human disease. Italy is no longer blocking scientific progress for universal benefit. We applaud this honourable decision that takes into full consideration pluralism of ideas and principles. On the other hand, reversal of the decision made by the Minister would have a negative effect on the whole European and International scientific community, slowing research progress towards regenerative therapies.

() The previous Italian government, together with Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Poland signed an ethical declaration aimed at excluding human embryonic stem cell research from funding under the 7th Framework Programme of the European Union.*

*(**) Italian Law 40/2004 prohibits the derivation of new human embryonic stem cell lines from overexceeding and frozen blastocysts but does not exclude research on existing human embryonic stem cell lines.*

*(***) The European Group on Ethics have carefully considered the ethical issues, and concluded that: "Stem cell research aims to alleviate severe human suffering. In any case, the embryos that have been used for research are required to be destroyed. Consequently, there is no argument for excluding funding of this kind of research from the Framework Programme of research of the European Union if it complies with ethical and legal requirements"*

*Opinion 15, "Ethical aspects of human stem cell research and use" 14 November 2000
Approved: June 12, 2006*

The International Society for Stem Cell Research is an independent, nonprofit organization established to promote and foster the exchange and dissemination of information and ideas relating to stem cells, to encourage the general field of research involving stem cells and to promote professional and public education in all areas of stem cell research and applications.