

Science and Policy

Science and technology have an increasing impact on every area of our lives. AAAS aims to ensure that the benefits of science and technology reach as many areas of society as possible by working with government and taking part in the policymaking process. AAAS serves society, government and the research community through a diverse range of activities, to promote human welfare and foster scientific freedom and responsibility.

It has been an eventful year. In the aftermath of terror attacks, U.S. homeland security and the war against terrorism have become critical issues with repercussions for every sphere of our society, including science. AAAS activities in this area have never been more important than they are today.

HOMELAND SECURITY UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

In 2003, AAAS started an analysis of research and development in homeland security, encompassing the work of the newly created U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Several comprehensive reports have been published, examining research and development spending in the context of the wider federal budget.

SECURITY CONCERNS TOP FORUM AGENDA

The 2003 AAAS Forum on Science and Technology Policy attracted the second-highest attendance ever. In addition to the customary analysis of the federal research and development budget, several issues of concern were in the spotlight, including homeland security, the war in Iraq, SARS, and other new public health challenges.

U.S. Presidential Science Adviser John H. Marburger III gave the keynote speech. He outlined the government's strategy for science and technology, and discussed the roles of the OSTP and federally funded science in the war on terrorism. He also addressed the scientific community's concerns about the increasing difficulty overseas students and scholars in science and technology are experiencing in obtaining visas, due to concerns about terrorism.

ADVANCING ETHICAL SCIENCE STANDARDS

Scientific advances in recent years have led to increasingly complex ethical dilemmas for society. AAAS continues to promote high ethical standards in science.

AAAS and The Hastings Center are collaborating on a project to provide tools for open and informed public discussion about the ethical and social issues raised by behavioral genetics. In May 2003, a public meeting was held to explore the promises and limitations of the science of behavioral genetics, and the social implications of behavioral science research.

BRIDGING SCIENCE AND RELIGION

AAAS aims to facilitate communication between scientific and religious communities. The field of astrobiology has been an important focus during 2003, and the goals of current astrobiology initiatives – to explore the origin, extent and future of life – raise fundamental philosophical, ethical and theological questions.

As part of this effort, AAAS held the first two of a series of three workshops to address issues associated with astrobiology. Participants included astrobiologists, theologians, ethicists, philosophers and historians.

HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM SEEKS THE TRUTH

Transitional justice research is a priority area for AAAS. It concerns societal responses – to severe repression, societal violence and systematic human rights violations – that seek to establish the truth about the past, determine accountability, and offer some form of redress. During 2003, the program provided scientific and technical assistance to truth commissions in Peru, Sierra Leone, East Timor and Ghana, and to other human rights groups in Ghana, Colombia and Chad.

ACTION NETWORK FURTHERS FIGHT FOR RIGHTS

Since 1993, the AAAS Human Rights Action Network has coordinated the efforts of scientists around the world to appeal to governments on behalf of colleagues whose human rights are being violated.

Over the past three years, the network campaigned on behalf of the Egyptian sociologist Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, who suffered persecution for his advocacy work and analysis of Egypt's social problems. In February 2003, AAAS recognized his courage and commitment to human rights in a special reception at the AAAS Annual Meeting.

Qs & As

with Albert H. Teich
Director of Science and Policy Programs



Q How can a scientist or engineer get practical experience in the policy world?

A In the AAAS Science and Technology Policy Fellowship Program. The program provides opportunities to work in a congressional office, on a committee staff, or in U.S. Executive Branch agencies ranging from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to the National Science Foundation and the Pentagon.

Q Where can I get up-to-date information on the federal U.S. budget and government funding for R&D?

A From the AAAS R&D Budget and Policy Program's website and publications. Everything you always wanted to know and more about the U.S. President's budget and congressional appropriations for R&D can be found there.

Q Who is fighting for the human rights of scientists, engineers and health professionals around the world?

A The AAAS Science and Human Rights Program. The program publicizes cases of scientists, engineers and health professionals whose rights are threatened or violated, and helps mobilize support for them. Many victims have been released from unjust imprisonment as a result of international pressure in which the AAAS program played a key role.

