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Statement Professor Dr. Christophe Boesch

As a scientist working on wild chimpanzees living in different habitats in Africa for the last 40 years, I am very supportive to the “Motion” to stop invasive primate research. Through my experience, I have become very sensitive to the importance of the socio-ecological conditions that are needed for these animals to become the skilled individuals that show a wealth of sets of behaviors such as to cooperate in groups, make and use different types of tools, adopt orphans, to name just a few.

As a scientist, I have also been directly involved in the working group producing the White Paper on animal research 2017 of the Max Planck Society, and as such I have visited research facilities performing invasive experiments on primates. While the scientific objectives seem in many instances to work towards improving human conditions suffering from different impairments, often nowadays still incurable, and thus justify in some cases the use of primates, it does not justify that these primates are kept in horrific conditions.

On one side, I am of the opinion that in extreme cases invasive research on primates can be allowed, however the 3Rs standards need to be followed very precisely and be controlled (see details to 3R below). On the other side, the living conditions provided to the primates used in such experiments being scandalous and unscientific, the outcome of such experiments are of a questionable value. All recent work in neuroscience confirms that living conditions affect directly the development of the brain, and having individuals in deprived social and environmental conditions produces individuals with a lot of impairments. Thus, I claim that scientists must be highly responsible, and if such experiments on primates are needed and justified, these must be done exclusively on primates kept under the most “normal” social and social enriched living conditions (“artgerecht” i.e. species- appropriate), before, during and after the experiments.

Ch. Boesch

Leipzig, 30th of November 2017

PS. The 3Rs standards include:

1. Replacement/Vermeidung: Animal testing should be replaced by supporting and funding alternative scientific methods.
2. Reduction/Verminderung: Animals used in invasive research should be reduced.

3. Refinement/Verbesserung: Animal testing should be improved using the highest standards and the newest scientific results.

The White Paper on animal research of the Max Planck Society includes another R about Responsibility/Verantwortung, which should evaluate the pain and damage the invasive research is doing to the animals. It should also improve the living conditions of the tested individuals.