AAPA Statement on Biological Aspects of Race

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PREAMBLE

As scientists who study human evolution and variation, we believe that we have an obligation to share with other scientists and the general public our current understanding of the structure of human variation from a biological perspective. Popular conceptualizations of race are derived from 19th and early 20th century scientific formulations. These old racial categories were based on externally visible traits, primarily skin color, features of the face, and the shape and size of the head and body, and the underlying skeleton. They were often imbued with nonbiological attributes, based on social constructions of race. These categories of race are rooted in the scientific traditions of the 19th century, and in even earlier philosophical traditions which presumed that immutable visible traits can predict the measure of all other traits in an individual or a population. Such notions have often been used to support racist doctrines. Yet old racial concepts persist as social conventions that foster institutional discrimination. The expression of prejudice may or may not undermine material well-being, but it does involve the mistreatment of people and thus it often is psychologically distressing and socially damaging. Scientists should try to keep the results of their research from being used in a biased way that would serve discriminatory ends.

POSITION

We offer the following points as revisions of the 1964 UNESCO statement on race:

1. All humans living today belong to a single species, *Homo sapiens*, and share a common descent. Although there are differences of opinion regarding how and where different human groups diverged or fused to form new ones from a common ancestral group, all living populations in each of the earth's geographic areas have evolved from that ancestral group over the same amount of time. Much of the biological variation among populations involves modest degrees of variation in the frequency of shared traits. Human populations have at times been isolated, but have never genetically diverged enough to produce any biological barriers to mating between members of different populations.

2. Biological differences between human beings reflect both hereditary factors and the influence of natural and social environments. In most cases, these differences are due to the interaction of both. The degree to which environment or heredity affects any particular trait varies greatly.

3. There is great genetic diversity within all human populations. Pure races, in the sense of genetically homogenous populations, do not exist in the human species today, nor is there any evidence that they have ever existed in the past.

4. There are obvious physical differences between populations living in different geographic areas of the world. Some of these differences are strongly inherited and

others, such as body size and shape, are strongly influenced by nutrition, way of life, and other aspects of the environment. Genetic differences between populations commonly consist of differences in the frequencies of all inherited traits, including those that are environmentally malleable.

5. For centuries, scholars have sought to comprehend patterns in nature by classifying living things. The only living species in the human family, *Homo sapiens*, has become a highly diversified global array of populations. The geographic pattern of genetic variation within this array is complex, and presents no major discontinuity. Humanity cannot be classified into discrete geographic categories with absolute boundaries. Furthermore, the complexities of human history make it difficult to determine the position of certain groups in classifications. Multiplying subcategories cannot correct the inadequacies of these classifications.

Generally, the traits used to characterize a population are either independently inherited or show only varying degrees of association with one another within each population. Therefore, the combination of these traits in an individual very commonly deviates from the average combination in the population. This fact renders untenable the idea of discrete races made up chiefly of typical representatives.

6. In humankind as well as in other animals, the genetic composition of each population is subject over time to the modifying influence of diverse factors. These include natural selection, promoting adaptation of the population to the environment; mutations, involving modifications in genetic material; admixture, leading to genetic exchange between local populations, and randomly changing frequencies of genetic characteristics from one generation to another. The human features which have universal biological value for the survival of the species are not known to occur more frequently in one population than in any other. Therefore it is meaningless from the biological point of view to attribute a general inferiority or superiority to this or to that race.

7. The human species has a past rich in migration, in territorial expansions, and in contractions. As a consequence, we are adapted to many of the earth's environments in general, but to none in particular. For many millennia, human progress in any field has been based on culture and not on genetic improvement.

Mating between members of different human groups tends to diminish differences between groups, and has played a very important role in human history. Wherever different human populations have come in contact, such matings have taken place. Obstacles to such interaction have been social and cultural, not biological. The global process of urbanization, coupled with intercontinental migrations, has the potential to reduce the differences among all human populations.

8. Partly as a result of gene flow, the hereditary characteristics of human populations are in a state of perpetual flux. Distinctive local populations are continually coming into and passing out of existence. Such populations do not correspond to breeds of

domestic animals, which have been produced by artificial selection over many generations for specific human purposes.

9. The biological consequences of mating depend only on the individual genetic makeup of the couple, and not on their racial classifications. Therefore, no biological justification exists for restricting intermarriage between persons of different racial classifications.

10. There is no necessary concordance between biological characteristics and culturally defined groups. On every continent, there are diverse populations that differ in language, economy, and culture. There is no national, religious, linguistic or cultural group or economic class that constitutes a race. However, human beings who speak the same language and share the same culture frequently select each other as mates, with the result that there is often some degree of correspondence between the distribution of physical traits on the one hand and that of linguistic and cultural traits on the other. But there is no causal linkage between these physical and behavioral traits, and therefore it is not justifiable to attribute cultural characteristics to genetic inheritance.

11. Physical, cultural and social environments influence the behavioral differences among individuals in society. Although heredity influences the behavioral variability of individuals within a given population, it does not affect the ability of any such population to function in a given social setting. The genetic capacity for intellectual development is one of the biological traits of our species essential for its survival. This genetic capacity is known to differ among individuals. The peoples of the world today appear to possess equal biological potential for assimilating any human culture. Racist political doctrines find no foundation in scientific knowledge concerning modern or past human populations.