

STATEMENT OF INTENT

between

**The Government of the Republic of India
Ministry of Science and Technology**

and

**The Government of the United States of America
Department of Health and Human Services**

on

Indo-U.S. Collaboration on Expansion of Vision Research

Recognizing:

The strong commitment shared by the two countries to reduce the burden of vision disability and blindness;

The launching of Vision 2020 by the World Health Organization and global partners with the common goal of eliminating preventable and treatable blindness;

The long history of successful research collaboration between India and U.S. scientists and institutions in the prevention of blindness;

The scientific accomplishments realized under previous Indo-US collaborative agreements, including the Indo-US Science and Technology Sub-commission and the Gandhi- Reagan Science and Technology Initiative;

The high degree of research expertise in basic biology and clinical science in both countries, which could make collaboration on an equal footing possible;

The agencies of the Government of India represented by the Department of Biotechnology of the Ministry of Science and Technology, and the agencies of the Government of the United States of America, represented by the National Eye Institute (NEI) within the Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), herein-after referred to as "Parties", mutually anticipate an expanded collaborative program of vision research.

Both parties intend to build upon previous research cooperation by drawing on the expertise of Indian and U.S. scientists in both public and private institutions to identify, promote and support collaborative biomedical and clinical research that will result in new and improved approaches to preventing visual disability and blindness. Because of the complex socioeconomic and service delivery issues that undergird the prevention and treatment of eye conditions and diseases, research into health services is also necessary. In addition to possible joint research projects, opportunities for collaboration include: 1) organization of workshops; 2) identification of training opportunities for researchers; 3) exchange of scientists; 4) exchange of scientific information; and 5) exchange of biological materials.

Consistent with preliminary discussions among scientists and administrators from both countries, it is expected the parties could pursue the following broad scientific areas:

Epidemiological studies to understand the genetic and environmental factors that underlie common eye diseases, including the genetic basis for susceptibility to environmental influences;

Genetics of inherited retinal disorders, congenital glaucoma, cataract and other eye diseases;

Adult stem cell research, and embryonic stem cell research in conformance with U.S. Government policy on such research as articulated by the President of the U.S. in 2001 for treating eye diseases, and related policies of the Government of India;

Mechanisms of cataract formation, and pharmacological modes of retarding the progression of cataract;

Traditional medicine and ethno-pharmacy research to provide clues to new drugs and related substances; and,

Analysis and policy formulation on the cost-effectiveness and public health benefits of new approaches to prevent and treat vision abnormalities.

In addition to this illustrative list of research areas, both parties may consider other vision research topics for inclusion, in conformance with the scientific research policies and priorities of both governments.

Activities contemplated under this Statement of Intent should operate on a principle of reciprocity. Both parties intend to rapidly review research proposals and protocols, as necessary, and to assist in identifying appropriate sources of funds to support these possible endeavors.

It is anticipated that steps for implementing this initiative will be developed through consultations after the Statement of Intent is signed. On the Indian side, the Department of Biotechnology should serve as the nodal agency, with the expectation of the involvement of other interested governmental and non-governmental organizations. Similarly, on the United States side, the HHS/NIH National Eye Institute intends to serve as the nodal agency, with the cooperation and involvement of other interested governmental and non-governmental organizations. The parties may identify scientific co-chairs in both countries to ensure appropriate liaison and implementation of research collaborations.

With this Statement of Intent, we recognize that Indo-US scientific cooperation can contribute significantly to the prevention of visual disability and blindness in India, the United States, and the globe. In signing this Statement of Intent, we encourage scientists and health providers in both our countries to work toward this goal.

For the Government of the
United States of America



Dr. Elias A. Zerhouni
Director
National Institutes of Health
Department of Health and Human Services

For the Government of the
Republic of India



Dr. Maharaj K. Bhan
Secretary
Department of Biotechnology
Ministry of Science and Technology