

Animal rights groups will challenge patent for mouse on ethical grounds

LONDON (AP) Animal rights organizations will challenge Europe's first patent for a genetically engineered animal, arguing that creating an animal whose purpose is "to suffer and die" is unethical, a British group said Thursday.

Compassion in World Farming said it and other groups would protest a European patent issued for the "oncomouse," a mouse genetically altered to be highly susceptible to cancer.

Scientists have hailed the mouse as one of the greatest tools for cancer research, enabling scientists to test new drugs and study cancer in a living model. Animal rights groups denounced it as unethical, and fear the patent will ease the way for genetically engineered farm animals.

Joyce DeSilva, director of Compassion in World Farming said, "We don't know if we will be able to fight it on technical grounds because we haven't seen the patent yet, but we will certainly fight it on ethical grounds."

Designing a "creature whose sole purpose in life is to suffer and die is unethical," she said.

Compassion in World Farming, whose main purpose is to ensure the humane treatment of farm animals, said it has gathered support from groups in Britain, France, Switzerland, Spain, Belgium, and Germany to oppose the patent once it is final.

The European Patent Office in Brussels last week reversed an earlier decision and said it would approve a patent

for the oncomouse. Formal opposition can be filed for the next nine months, after which the decision will be reviewed and finalized.

The European Patent Office had rejected the mouse patent in 1989, causing complaints from biotechnology groups that claimed scientists would leave Europe to do such research.

The European Patent Office is not part of the European Community, so non-European countries also may apply for patents.

The United States approved a patent for the oncomouse in 1987. The animal was developed by two Harvard researchers, Philip Leder and Timothy Stewart, and is

owned by the American chemical company DuPont.

Dr. Andrew Christie, a research fellow in intellectual property law at Cambridge University, said the animal rights groups' plans to challenge the patent office is the "wrong approach."

"In a legal sense, you're entitled to make an argument because a patent cannot be granted if it is contrary to public order or morality," Christie said.

But because patents alone do not cause animal suffering, the groups should instead direct their arguments to the European Parliament and seek legislation to protect animals, he said.

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Everest climber denounces rubbish left in Himalayas

LONDON (Reuter-Kyodo) Mount Everest climber Chris Bonington said the Himalayan range is becoming a huge rubbish dump and called on local governments, as well as Western tourists and climbers, to share responsibility for the clean-up.

"I don't think the answer is huge clean-up expeditions," Bonington said at a news conference called by Tourism Concern, an organization that has launched a Himalayan Tourist Code aimed at preserving the environment in heavily-traveled areas.

Bonington said the solution is to raise the state of aware-

ness among visitors to the Himalayas.

"I'm not sure how you go about it, but we've got to the point where governments have to start taking responsibility as well."

Bonington, who reached the 8,848 meter summit of Everest in 1985, said that on his first visit to Nepal in 1960 he had found a "sleepy" country into which mountaineering expeditions were allowed one at a time.

"Until last year I was acquiescent and complaisant about the rubbish problem," he said.