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"Scientists Come Out for Human Rights "* by  
*Sonia Shah*

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## March Roundtable: Introduction

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## March Roundtable: Introduction

### Abstract

An annotation of:

“Scientists Come Out for Human Rights ” by Sonia Shah. The Nation. January 27, 2009.

### Keywords

Human rights, Science, Science and Human Rights Coalition, Advocacy, Conflict of interest

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**“Scientists Come Out for Human Rights ” by Sonia Shah. *The Nation*. January 27, 2009.**

An Annotation

Scientists are often regarded by society as methodical intellectuals solely fixated in their pursuit of medical and technological advances. However, as detailed by Sonia Shah in this month's centerpiece, the establishment of the Science and Human Rights Coalition by the American Association for the Advancement of Science may usher new members to the field of human rights advocacy as scientists are being called upon to actively participate in the promotion and protection of human rights.

**"The scientific masses have by and large remained impassively unmoved, with nary a head turned for the din and crash of messy social realities outside their rarefied digs. But cracks in that notoriously apolitical stance have started to appear."**

Increasingly, scientists and their scientific methods of research and analysis are utilized in the documentation of human rights abuses across the globe. Thus, for many scientists, incorporating human rights promotion into their work is unproblematic, and, in fact, may even be deemed complementary to the pursuit of truth and reason which lies at the heart scientific inquiry.

**"Of course, it will take more than charitable intentions to reorient scientific inquiry to serve rather than undermine human rights."**

This recent push for human rights promotion reveals underlying tensions between scientists and those who fund scientific research and development. Specifically, corporations, such as chemical and pharmaceutical companies, and governments who may be responsible for human rights atrocities have the power to direct funding for research, and therefore direct research itself. Moreover, ever-present human rights violations demand expeditious responses by human rights defenders, which contrast sharply with the often slow-moving and cautious field of science. Here, it is essential to question whether scientists can be effective human rights advocates, or if their very methods of research and observation hinder human rights promotion when it is most needed. Regardless, by shedding new light and a fresh perspective on human rights protection, scientists, and the field of science, may have the potential to make significant strides in guaranteeing human rights.

**These issues and others are considered in this month's Roundtable.**