



## **International Federation of Fertility Societies**

Fédération internationale des sociétés de fertilité

Federación internacional de las sociedades de fertilidad

Media Release

# **European Moves Towards Embryo Screening Welcomed by International Fertility Experts**

For immediate release, 3 May 2009

The International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS) welcomes the moves by European authorities towards the acceptance of embryo selection to reduce the burden of disease in later life. In two landmark pieces of legislation within the last two weeks, European politicians moved towards the use of Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) to help eliminate rare diseases and hereditary cancers.

On 24<sup>th</sup> April, the European Parliament adopted an amendment\* which recommends *".. that Member States encourage efforts to avoid rare diseases which are hereditary, through genetic counseling of carrier parents and, where appropriate and not contrary to existing national laws and always on a voluntary basis, through pre-implantation selection of healthy embryos"*. This amendment is aimed at reducing the burden of rare diseases in Europe, which can affect up to 36 million European citizens. Two days previously, the Spanish authorities authorized the genetic screening of pre-implantation embryos to ensure they do not carry genes that might cause cancer. In January this year, a woman in the UK became the first person to give birth to a child who had been selected to be free of the BRCA-1 gene, which carries a high risk of developing breast cancer. About 5% breast cancer cases are estimated to be caused by the BRCA-1 and BRCA-2 genes, both of which can be detected in embryos.

**Commenting on behalf of the International Federation of Fertility Societies, Dr Richard Kennedy (Secretary General) said:**

***The International Federation of Fertility Societies welcomes these positive moves by parliaments in Europe towards the acceptance of Pre-implantation Genetic Diagnosis (PGD) as a way of reducing the burden of disease. PGD offers a very real way of giving parents the opportunity to remove the risks of serious diseases. These children will be able to grow into healthy adults without the fear that what is written in their genes might condemn them to a serious illness in later life.***

***The moves by European and Spanish authorities show a mature attitude to ensuring that these children live a life as free from illness as possible. We hope that other national and international authorities move towards similar positions.***

**ENDS**

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**The International Federation of Fertility Societies (IFFS) is the main international body representing national societies working in the fields of fertility and contraception. The IFFS has**

**57 member societies from all parts of the world. Since its founding in 1951, the IFFS has undertaken a wide range of activities to promote the science and clinical practice of fertility at an international level. The next IFFS World Congress will take place in Munich in 2010 (<http://www.iffs2010.com/invitation.html>) .**

**The IFFS can comment on any international issues relating to human reproduction. See: <http://www.iffs-reproduction.org/index.html>**

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\*See EU press release at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress\\_page/066-54198-111-04-17-911-20090422|PR54197-21-04-2009-2009-false/default\\_en.htm](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/expert/infopress_page/066-54198-111-04-17-911-20090422|PR54197-21-04-2009-2009-false/default_en.htm)