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HOMEOPATHY

BRITISH SCIENTISTS ASK THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION TO CONDEMN HOMEOPATHY FOR DISEASES SUCH AS HIV CLINICS THROUGHOUT ASIA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA OFFERING INEFFECTIVE REMEDIES FOR SERIOUS ILLNESSES, PUTTING LIVES AT RISK.

BRITISH SCIENTISTS HAVE APPEALED TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION TO PUBLICLY CONDEMN HOMEOPATHY AS A TREATMENT FOR SERIOUS DISEASES, SUCH AS HIV, TB AND MALARIA.

THE RESEARCHERS, MANY OF WHOM HAVE WORKED IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, CALLED ON THE WHO TO ACT AMID FEARS THAT VULNERABLE PATIENTS ARE DYING AFTER TURNING TO HOMEOPATHIC PREPARATIONS INSTEAD OF EFFECTIVE MEDICINES.

THE WHO WORKS WITH NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS THAT PROMOTE HOMEOPATHY AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES IN THEIR PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMMES.

HOMEOPATHY PRACTITIONERS HAVE OPENED CLINICS THROUGHOUT ASIAN AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND OFFER TO TREAT PATIENTS WITH HIV, MALARIA, INFLUENZA AND CHILDHOOD DIARRHOEA, NONE OF WHICH HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO RESPOND TO HOMEOPATHY. MANY PATIENTS ARE TOLD THAT CONVENTIONAL DRUGS WORK ONLY TEMPORARILY AND THAT HOMEOPATHIC PREPARATIONS ARE CHEAP AND EFFECTIVE ALTERNATIVES WITH FEWER SIDE EFFECTS.

"THOSE OF US WORKING WITH THE MOST RURAL AND IMPOVERISHED PEOPLE OF THE WORLD ALREADY STRUGGLE TO DELIVER THE MEDICAL HELP THAT IS NEEDED. WHEN HOMEOPATHY STANDS IN PLACE OF EFFECTIVE TREATMENT, LIVES ARE LOST," THE SCIENTISTS WRITE IN AN OPEN LETTER TO THE ORGANISATION.

HOMEOPATHIC MEDICINES ARE MADE BY REPEATEDLY DILUTING PREPARATIONS WITH WATER UNTIL THERE IS NO TRACE LEFT OF THE ORIGINAL COMPOUND. THE OVERWHELMING MEDICAL OPINION IS THAT HOMEOPATHIC TREATMENTS ARE NO MORE EFFECTIVE THAN PLACEBOS.

"THE WHO'S STRATEGY IS VERY UNCLEAR ON HOMEOPATHY AND THAT IS SHOCKING. THEY ARE SUPPOSED TO BE ARTICULATING EVIDENCE-BASED MEDICINE, BUT THEIR STANCE IS VERY WISHY-WASHY," SAID DR DANIELLA MUALLEM, A BIOPHYSICIST AT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON, WHO SIGNED THE LETTER.

"HOMEOPATHY IS CHEAP, BUT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS FOR THESE DISEASES, AND THE WAY THEY ARE BEING SOLD BY PRACTITIONERS IS DANGEROUS AND COMPLETELY UNETHICAL. THERE ARE MEDICINES THAT DO WORK AND WE SHOULD BE ADVOCATING TRYING TO GET THOSE TO PEOPLE," MUALLEM ADDED.

ACCORDING TO WHO ESTIMATES, 33 MILLION PEOPLE WERE LIVING WITH THE HIV VIRUS AT THE END OF 2007, AND DURING THAT ONE YEAR, 2 MILLION PEOPLE DIED OF AIDS, INCLUDING 270,000 CHILDREN. TWO-THIRDS OF THE WORLD'S HIV CASES ARE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.

THE ORGANISATION RECORDED 247 MILLION CASES OF MALARIA AND NEARLY 1 MILLION DEATHS IN 2006. A CHILD DIES OF THE DISEASE EVERY 30 SECONDS.

IN THE LETTER, EARLY CAREER MEDICS AND RESEARCHERS FROM THE VOICE OF YOUNG SCIENCE NETWORK HIGHLIGHT HOMEOPATHY PROJECTS IN KENYA, TANZANIA, ETHIOPIA, GHANA AND BOTSWANA THAT ALL OFFER TO TREAT PATIENTS WITH HIV, MALARIA, DIARRHEA OR THE FLU.

"MANY PEOPLE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES URGENTLY NEED ACCESS TO EVIDENCE-BASED MEDICAL INFORMATION AND TO THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS OF TREATING THESE DANGEROUS DISEASES. THE PROMOTION OF HOMEOPATHY AS EFFECTIVE OR CHEAPER MAKES THIS DIFFICULT TASK EVEN HARDER. IT PUTS LIVES AT RISK, UNDERMINES CONVENTIONAL MEDICINE AND SPREADS MISINFORMATION," THE LETTER SAYS.

RAYMOND TALLIS, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF GERIATRIC MEDICINE AT MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY, SAID: "THE CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES OF PROMOTING IRRATIONAL AND INEFFECTIVE TREATMENTS FOR SERIOUS ILLNESSES HAVE BEEN DEMONSTRATED IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHERE THABO MBEKI'S POLICIES HAVE LED TO AN ESTIMATED 365,000 UNNECESSARY PREMATURE DEATHS. THE PROSPECT OF REPLICATING THIS RECKLESS BEHAVIOUR ELSEWHERE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES BY ADVOCATING HOMEOPATHIC TREATMENTS FOR AIDS AND OTHER POTENTIALLY LETHAL CONDITIONS IS APPALLING."\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

HOBBITS 'ARE A SEPARATE SPECIES'

SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND MORE EVIDENCE THAT THE INDONESIAN "HOBBIT" SKELETONS BELONG TO A NEW SPECIES OF HUMAN - AND NOT MODERN PYGMIES.

THE ONE METRE (3FT) TALL, 30KG (65LBS) HUMANS ROAMED THE INDONESIAN ISLAND OF FLORES, PERHAPS UP TO 8,000 YEARS AGO.

SINCE THE DISCOVERY, RESEARCHERS HAVE ARGUED VEHEMENTLY AS TO THE IDENTITY OF THESE DIMINUTIVE PEOPLE.

TWO PAPERS IN THE JOURNAL NATURE NOW SUPPORT THE IDEA THEY WERE AN ENTIRELY NEW SPECIES OF HUMAN.

THE TEAM, WHICH DISCOVERED THE TINY REMAINS IN LIANG BUA CAVE ON FLORES, CONTENDS THAT THE POPULATION BELONGS TO THE SPECIES HOMO FLORESIENSIS - SEPARATE FROM OUR OWN GROUPING HOMO SAPIENS .

THEY ARGUE THAT THE "HOBBITS" ARE DESCENDED FROM A PREHISTORIC SPECIES OF HUMAN - PERHAPS HOMO ERECTUS - WHICH REACHED ISLAND SOUTH-EAST ASIA MORE THAN A MILLION YEARS AGO.

OVER MANY YEARS, THEIR BODIES MOST LIKELY EVOLVED TO BE SMALLER IN SIZE, THROUGH A NATURAL SELECTION PROCESS CALLED ISLAND DWARFING, CLAIM THE DISCOVERERS, AND MANY OTHER SCIENTISTS.

HOWEVER, SOME RESEARCHERS ARGUED THAT THIS COULD NOT ACCOUNT FOR THE HOBBIT'S CHIMP-SIZED BRAIN OF ALMOST 400 CUBIC CM - A THIRD THE SIZE OF THE MODERN HUMAN BRAIN.

DISEASE THEORY

THIS WAS A PUZZLE, THEY SAID, BECAUSE THE INDIVIDUALS SEEM TO HAVE CRAFTED COMPLEX STONE TOOLS.

THEY SAID THE HOBBITS WERE PROBABLY PART OF A GROUP OF MODERN HUMANS WITH ABNORMALLY SMALL BRAINS.

ONE TEAM LED BY WILLIAM JUNGERS FROM STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY IN THE US ANALYSED REMAINS OF THE HOBBIT FOOT.

THEY FOUND THAT, IN SOME WAYS, IT IS INCREDIBLY HUMAN. THE BIG TOE IS ALIGNED WITH THE OTHERS AND THE JOINTS MAKE IT POSSIBLE TO EXTEND THE TOES AS THE BODY'S FULL WEIGHT FALLS ON THE FOOT, ATTRIBUTES NOT FOUND IN GREAT APES.

BUT IN OTHER RESPECTS, IT IS INCREDIBLY PRIMITIVE. IT IS FAR LONGER THAN ITS MODERN HUMAN EQUIVALENT, AND EQUIPPED WITH A VERY SMALL BIG TOE, LONG, CURVED LATERAL TOES, AND A WEIGHT-BEARING STRUCTURE THAT RESEMBLES THAT OF A CHIMPANZEE.

SO UNLESS THE FLORES HOBBITS BECAME MORE PRIMITIVE OVER TIME - A RATHER UNLIKELY SCENARIO - THEY MUST HAVE BRANCHED OFF THE HUMAN LINE AT AN EVEN EARLIER DATE.

IN ANOTHER STUDY, ELEANOR WESTON AND ADRIAN LISTER OF LONDON'S NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM LOOKED AT FOSSILS OF SEVERAL SPECIES OF ANCIENT HIPPOS. THEY THEN COMPARED THOSE FOUND ON THE ISLAND OF MADAGASCAR WITH THE MAINLAND ANCESTORS FROM WHICH THEY EVOLVED.

"IT COULD BE THAT H. FLORESIENSIS' SKULL IS THAT OF A HOMO ERECTUS THAT HAS BECOME DWARFED FROM LIVING ON AN ISLAND, RATHER THAN BEING AN ABNORMAL INDIVIDUAL OR SEPARATELY-EVOLVED SPECIES, AS HAS BEEN SUGGESTED," SAID DR WESTON, A PALAEONTOLOGIST AT THE MUSEUM.

"LOOKING AT PYGMY HIPPOS IN MADAGASCAR, WHICH POSSESS EXCEPTIONALLY SMALL BRAINS FOR THEIR SIZE, SUGGESTS THAT THE SAME COULD BE TRUE FOR H. FLORESIENSIS , AND THAT (IT COULD BE) THE RESULT OF BEING ISOLATED ON THE ISLAND."

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THE ARENA GOES ABROAD

NIMIBIA - BIRTHPLACE OF MODERN HUMANS NARROWED DOWN

AFRICANS ARE MORE GENETICALLY DIVERSE THAN THE INHABITANTS OF THE REST OF THE WORLD COMBINED, ACCORDING TO A SWEEPING STUDY THAT CARRIED RESEARCHERS INTO REMOTE REGIONS TO SAMPLE THE BLOODLINES OF MORE THAN 100 DISTINCT POPULATIONS.

THE REPORT, PUBLISHED YESTERDAY IN THE JOURNAL SCIENCE EXPRESS, SUGGESTS THAT, BECAUSE OF HISTORICAL MIGRATIONS AND GENETIC MIXING ACROSS THE CONTINENT, IT WILL BE HARD FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS TO TRACE THEIR ANCESTRY IN FINE DETAIL. AFRICAN AMERICAN GENEALOGIES ARE INCREASINGLY POPULAR AND COMMERCIALIZED, BUT THE AUTHORS OF THE NEW STUDY CAST DOUBT ON HOW PRECISE SUCH SEARCHES CAN BE, GIVEN THE COMPLEXITY OF THE GENETIC MAKEUP OF AFRICANS.

"IT MAY BE VERY CHALLENGING TO TRACE BACK ANCESTRY TO PARTICULAR TRIBES OR ETHNIC GROUPS," SAID SARAH TISHKOFF, A UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA GENETICIST WHO LED THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH TEAM.

THE FIRST ANATOMICALLY MODERN HUMANS ORIGINATED IN AFRICA ABOUT 200,000 YEARS AGO, AND ALL HUMANS TODAY ARE THEIR DIRECT DESCENDANTS. THE STUDY POINTS TO AN AREA ALONG THE NAMIBIA-SOUTH AFRICA BORDER, THE HOMELAND OF THE SAN PEOPLE, AS THE STARTING POINT FOR A SOUTHWEST-TO-NORTHEAST MIGRATORY ROUTE THAT CARRIED PEOPLE THROUGH AFRICA AND ACROSS THE RED SEA INTO EURASIA.

TISHKOFF SAID THE NEW FINDINGS WILL HELP MEDICAL RESEARCHERS TAILOR DRUG TREATMENTS FOR DIFFERENT GROUPS OF AFRICANS RATHER THAN TREATING THEM AS HOMOGENOUS.

"THIS IS AN ABSOLUTE LANDMARK. IT'S INCREDIBLE," SAID ALISON BROOKS, A PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS AT GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY. "IT'S THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE DOCUMENT EVER PUBLISHED DESCRIBING THE VERY COMPLEX ISSUE OF AFRICAN GENETIC VARIATION." SHE ADDED, "THERE'S BEEN SO MUCH GENETIC ANALYSIS THAT'S BEEN SO EUROCENTRIC."

TISHKOFF, WHO UNTIL LAST YEAR WAS A PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, DID MUCH OF HER FIELDWORK IN REMOTE AREAS REACHABLE ONLY WITH FOUR-WHEEL-DRIVE VEHICLES. SHE HAD TO HAUL CENTRIFUGES, FOR PROCESSING BLOOD SAMPLES, INTO VILLAGES WITHOUT ELECTRICITY, OFTEN RUNNING HER DEVICES BY CONNECTING THEM TO HER CAR BATTERY.

"SOME PEOPLE HAD NEVER SEEN A FAIR-SKINNED PERSON BEFORE," TISHKOFF SAID. "MANY OF THESE GROUPS HAVE BEEN STUDIED BY LINGUISTS AND ANTHROPOLOGISTS, AND WE'VE KNOWN NOTHING ABOUT THEIR GENETIC HISTORY. UNTIL NOW."

ONE OF HER COLLABORATORS, MUNTASER IBRAHIM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF KHARTOUM, SAID INDIGENOUS PEOPLE WERE EAGER TO HELP THE RESEARCH. "THEY WOULD LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT THEIR PAST AS MUCH AS EVERYBODY ELSE," HE SAID. "THE NOTION THAT PEOPLE IN REMOTE AREAS ARE NOT INTERESTED IN GENETICS IS NOT TRUE."

ALTHOUGH THE STUDY'S MAIN FOCUS WAS ON AFRICA, TISHKOFF AND HER COLLEAGUES STUDIED DNA MARKERS FROM AROUND THE PLANET, IDENTIFYING 14 "ANCESTRAL CLUSTERS" FOR ALL OF HUMANITY. NINE OF THOSE CLUSTERS ARE IN AFRICA. "YOU'RE SEEING MORE DIVERSITY IN ONE CONTINENT THAN ACROSS THE GLOBE," TISHKOFF SAID.

HER TEAM LOOKED AT 98 AFRICAN AMERICANS FROM NORTH CAROLINA, BALTIMORE, CHICAGO AND PITTSBURGH. THE RESEARCHERS DETERMINED THAT, ON AVERAGE, 71 PERCENT OF THEIR GENES COULD BE TRACED TO THE FAR-FLUNG AFRICAN LINGUISTIC GROUP NIGER-KORDOFANIAN, 8 PERCENT TO OTHER AFRICAN GROUPS AND 13 PERCENT TO EUROPE, WITH A SMATTERING OF GENETIC MARKERS POINTING TO OTHER PLACES ON THE GLOBE.

BUT THE PERCENTAGES VARY WIDELY FROM INDIVIDUAL TO INDIVIDUAL. IN A CONFERENCE CALL WITH REPORTERS, TISHKOFF SAID THE 13 PERCENT FIGURE FOR EUROPEAN GENETIC MARKERS MAY BE A SLIGHT UNDERESTIMATE; OTHER STUDIES HAVE FOUND NUMBERS CLOSER TO 20 PERCENT.

HER FINDINGS PROVIDE A KIND OF CAVEAT TO THE INCREASINGLY POPULAR GENE-BASED GENEALOGICAL SEARCHES AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS. TISHKOFF STUDIED VERY SHORT SNIPPETS OF NUCLEAR DNA; SOME COMMERCIAL RESEARCH COMPANIES FOCUS ONLY ON THE Y CHROMOSOME OR ON A TYPE OF DNA KNOWN AS MITOCHONDRIAL DNA. THESE LATTER TECHNIQUES CAN OFFER A KIND OF THREAD INTO THE PAST TO A SINGLE ANCESTOR, RATHER THAN TO THE FULL COMPLEMENT OF ANCESTORS.

"THERE IS NO RELEVANCE TO WHAT WE DO AT AFRICAN ANCESTRY," SAID RICK KITTLES, SCIENTIFIC DIRECTOR OF THAT COMPANY. "WE DO NOT USE NUCLEAR MARKERS LIKE SARAH DID IN THIS STUDY."

BROOKS, OF GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, SAID THE REPORT WILL HELP RESOLVE ACADEMIC DEBATES AMONG ARCHEOLOGISTS AND LINGUISTS: "THE STUDY SHOWS THAT SINGLE SOURCES OF DATA, WHETHER FROM ARCHAEOLOGY, ORAL HISTORY, GENETICS OR LINGUISTIC SIMILARITY, ARE NOT SUFFICIENT TO UNDERSTAND THE COMPLEX HISTORY OF AN AFRICAN REGION -- ONE CAN BE TRANSMITTED WITHOUT THE OTHERS, AND EACH HAS A DIFFERENT STORY TO TELL ABOUT THE PAST."

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FAMOUS QUOTES

JESSE VENTURA (BORN 1951 AS JAMES GEORGE JANOS), ALSO KNOWN AS "THE BODY," IS AN AMERICAN POLITICIAN, RETIRED PROFESSIONAL WRESTLER AND COLOR COMMENTATOR, NAVY UDT VETERAN, ACTOR, AND FORMER RADIO AND TELEVISION TALK SHOW HOST.

IN THE MINNESOTA GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION OF 1998, RUNNING AS AN INDEPENDENT AND MEMBER OF THE REFORM PARTY, HE WAS ELECTED THE 38TH GOVERNOR OF MINNESOTA AND SERVED FROM JANUARY 4, 1999 TO JANUARY 6, 2003 WITHOUT SEEKING A SECOND TERM.

"ORGANIZED RELIGION IS A SHAM AND A CRUTCH FOR WEAK-MINDED PEOPLE WHO NEED STRENGTH IN NUMBERS.

IT TELLS PEOPLE TO GO OUT AND STICK THEIR NOSES IN OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS."