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Press Release by Bioethics Advisory Committee

Judge (ret.) Richard Magnus is the First Singaporean to be Elected as Vice-Chair of UNESCO's International Bioethics Committee

Judge (ret.) Richard Magnus, Chair of the Bioethics Advisory Committee (BAC), has been elected as a Vice-Chair of the International Bioethics Committee (IBC) of UNESCO for a two-year term until the end of the 24th (Ordinary) IBC Session in 2017. This is the first time Singapore is being represented in the IBC Bureau.

2. The IBC is the only advisory body of the United Nations system engaging in ethical issues related to life sciences and its applications in order to ensure respect for human dignity and freedom. It was created in 1993, and comprises 36 independent experts who are appointed by the UNESCO Director-General.

3. The IBC was involved in the elaboration of the Universal Declaration on Human Genome and Human Rights (1997), the International Declaration on Human Genetic Data (2003) and the Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005), which are to date, the only international instruments of reference in the field of bioethics. For 2016 to 2017, the IBC is looking into Healthcare for Refugees, and Big Data in Healthcare and Health Research.

4. The BAC was established by the Singapore Government in December 2000 to address the ethical, legal and social issues arising from research on human biology and behaviour, and its applications. It develops and recommends policies on these issues, with the aim of protecting the rights and welfare of individuals, while allowing the biomedical sciences to develop and realise its full potential for the benefit of mankind.

5. Judge (ret.) Magnus has served on the BAC since it was formed, notably as the Chair of the Human Embryo and Chimera Research Working Group that examined the *Ethical, Legal and Social Issues in Human Stem Cell Research, Reproductive and Therapeutic Cloning* (2002) and *Human-Animal Combinations in Stem Cell Research* (2010). The recommendations made by his Working Group - which were adopted by the BAC in its reports – have been the foundation for subsequent legislation, including the Human Cloning and Other Prohibited Practices Act (2004) that has outlawed reproductive cloning in

Singapore, and the Human Biomedical Research Act (2015), which has established a legal framework in Singapore for research involving human embryo and human-animal combinations.

6. Judge (ret.) Magnus took over the reins of BAC in 2011. As Chair, he led the Committee through an extensive review of the BAC's past recommendations, which culminated in the *Ethics Guidelines for Human Biomedical Research* that was published last year. The *Guidelines* is a consolidated resource for researchers and members of ethics review committees, outlining the BAC's most definitive positions to date. Over the years, Judge (ret.) Magnus and his Committee have also organised several public events to elevate public awareness on bioethics in Singapore, such as the first-ever Bioethics Festival in July last year, which included various activities such as talks, workshops and movie screenings for the public. Details of this year's Bioethics Festival are available on the BAC website.

7. Under Judge (ret.) Magnus' chairmanship, the BAC has significantly raised Singapore's international reputation in the field of bioethics through its active participation in the UNESCO Bioethics Programme, and establishment of strategic links with the BAC's overseas counterparts. As a result of Judge (ret.) Magnus' outstanding contributions to the IBC and his advocacy, Singapore was successfully elected as a Member State of the Inter-Governmental Bioethics Committee in 2013, and is Rapporteur for 2016 to 2017.

8. In addition to the IBC appointment, Judge (ret.) Magnus has also been appointed onto a UNESCO-Human Variome Project Working Group that is developing bioethics standards for the responsible sharing of human genomic data. He is also a member of the UNESCO Editorial Board that is producing a Book on Bioethics for Judges.

9. Judge (ret.) Magnus, who is the current Chair of the Public Transport Council, was Singapore's First Representative to the ASEAN Inter-Governmental Commission on Human Rights from 2009 to 2012.

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