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ICAMSR
16 N. Hartland Street
Middleport, New York 14105
USA

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE AGAINST SENDING MARS SAMPLES DIRECTLY TO EARTH

Petition:

During the next decade, NASA will begin Phase One of its Mars Sample Return mission to gather samples from the surface of Mars for return to the Earth. We the undersigned, find this concept is an unacceptable risk to Earth’s biosphere in light of peer reviewed scientific documentation that supports the possibility that microbial life was found on Mars 25 years ago by the Viking Lander 1 and 2 spacecraft. Also, evidence for indigenous fossilized microbes in meteorites from Mars has been documented. If there is microbial life on Mars as some data suggests, then that life needs to be characterized and studied with great caution on the surface of Mars before we return it to Earth. Furthermore, because of the 1999 loss of both Mars Climate Orbiter and the Mars Polar Lander spacecraft, which were both found to be due to human error, we demand that the expensive and risky Mars Sample Return project be postponed until the following four-step plan is implemented by NASA and other participating space faring nations:

Phase 1) Increase the number of life sciences landers going to Mars and land them in different geographical locations. These landers will carry out in-situ testing of the Martian surface/subsurface to narrow the probability range of any life detected in the samples; a) define the environmental envelope for growth and survival of any life detected. Also, this phase would also test inhibitory agents for effectiveness on any life found.

Phase 2) A second series of tests will be conducted in Martian orbit aboard a newly designed automated life sciences laboratory for the purpose to determine any interactions between Martian microorganisms and selected terrestrial ecosystems.

Phase 3) After numerous robotic spacecraft have conducted their life sciences survey of the surface of Mars in many different locations, the cautious return of samples to the vicinity of the Earth may proceed. Upon achieving Earth orbit, the Mars Sample canister status would be evaluated by a qualified Biohazard Reentry Team aboard a vehicle like SpaceHab or the International Space Station. Preliminary quarantine tests would be conducted in Earth orbit before transfer to the Earth's surface.

Phase 4) Once phases 1-3 have been carried out, the Mars Sample Return canister with samples inside would be transferred to the Earth's surface to be analyzed in a high security Level 4 Planetary Sample receiving Laboratory.

We believe these findings fully warrant the position conveyed to NASA by the Center For Disease Control and the National Research Council, that any Martian soil and rock samples be treated as "biohazardous" materials until proven otherwise.

We, the undersigned feel that before transferring any Martian soil and/or rock samples to Earth, that a life sciences survey of the Martian surface/subsurface must be conducted in various locations. Then if the return of samples is warranted and brought within the vicinity of Earth, they should first be examined and certified "biosphere safe" by competent scientists aboard the Space Shuttle, International Space Station, or on another Earth orbiting facility designed, equipped and staffed to handle and study biohazardous materials.

Name: __________________________________________
Address: _______________________________________
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Email: _________________________________________

All personal information and email addresses will be kept strictly confidential.