

Press release LAV – June 6th 2019

VIVISECTION: MACACQUES BLINDED - TORINO UNIVERSITY, PROTAGONIST OF A TERRIBLE EXPERIMENT. APPEAL BY THE LAV TO THE MINISTER OF HEALTH: STOP THE PROJECT AND FREE THE ANIMALS! #CIVEDIAMOLIBERI



(The experiments make them blind)

The University of Turin approves and supports vivisection on macaques, this is the terrible news that the LAV - Anti-Vivisection League - makes known to the world today. In fact, the Department of Psychology at Piedmont University has received authorisation and funding for research entitled "[LIGHTUP - Turning the cortically blind brain to see](#)". which involves the use of macaques to be subjected to a long training period (with immobilisation in several parts of the body for hours, almost every day, for weeks or even months) and to surgical removal of areas of the visual cortex in order to **make the macaques clinically blind**. The study will be done in collaboration with the **University of Parma** where the animals are housed.

LAV appeals to the **Minister of Health Giulia Grillo** to **immediately revoke the authorisation for this research project** and allow these animals to be freed to a suitable recovery centre. The law, along with political and scientific context, prioritise non-animal models, a reality sustained and desired beyond our borders. Italy must change course if it wants to have a future.

We ask all citizens to sign the petition (change.org/civediamoliberi) on **change.org** to put an end to this useless whirlwind of morally-unsustainable pain, without delay and before it is too late, because science, like any other human activity, cannot ignore ethics.

The aim, presupposed, of this invasive, painful and long experiment is **to recreate an animal model for the study of people suffering from blind sight**, who have consequently lost their sight due to brain damage and not to problems related to the eye. The experiment also includes human volunteers, naturally carrying this type of blindness, who are subjected to non-invasive detection techniques. The recourse in parallel to people makes every justification given to the use of apes invalid; in fact, if in human subjects we can discover, with reliable data as it is species-specific, what is of interest for research, why use primates at all for studies whose results are more than questionable?

Innovative techniques on man can be and must be implemented, such as TMS, fMRI, electrocorticography (ECoG) / intracranial electroencephalography (EEG), magnetoencephalography (MEG), microelectrode recordings of sets of cells or single units, cortico-Cortical Evoked Potentials, diffusion tensor imaging and others. The methodological error is also reflected in the fact that almost half of the macaque brain is not significantly similar to the human one, in fact the cortical circuits evolve independently in the different species (1).

Furthermore, **neurological experiments cause enormous suffering to the animals** who are forced into immobilisation devices in order to make splits in the skull to expose the brain or insert rods to block the head during recording and stimulation sessions.

To shed more light on what is supported by public funds, which every citizen finances with his own taxes, we have been asking the Ministry for almost a year to obtain the protocol and authorisation documents from all the bodies involved, but we have always been denied these, despite two appeals to the TAR, first saying that no authorisation existed and then blatantly admitting that the authorisation did indeed exist but refusing to give it to us because it would contain "sensitive data"; we, however, do not ask for the names of the researchers, but for the reasons why a practice prohibited by the same law - namely the use of non-human primates in animal experimentation - has nevertheless been authorised and for what reason, in light of a mandatory principle expressed in the regulation that legislates on the subject: transparency.

In fact we recall that the same Ministry *"can authorise the use of non-human primates only by way of exception"* because there exist specific reasons, including ethical ones and the European Commission has produced a very restrictive report (2) on the matter, while an independent Dutch Institute, upon request of its own Government, has even stated that the use of apes could be interrupted immediately, calling it an unsustainable model, not only for ethical reasons, but also scientific and legal ones (3).

How many monkeys and how many other animals undergo experiments in Italy?

The Ministry of Health has published the numbers of animals used in 2017 for experimental purposes and these are alarming data: in total **580,073 animals in 2017. Monkeys are among the species whose use and killing is growing:**

already doubled, they rose to 586. Dogs (639) and rabbits are also on the rise. Painful procedures for 46% of animals. Animals raised for the sole maintenance of genetically modified colonies increased to 2,538. 1,598 animals still used for educational purposes. Finally, for years, LAV has been asking for data on unsuccessful tests to be disclosed.

PRESS KIT

- **Press release LAV - Anti-Vivisection League**
- Platform for online petition: change.org/civediamoliberi
- Research entitled "LIGHTUP - Turning the cortically blind brain to see"
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oqpMFYJM2OVmPOQMyO3m_9vaUo-9mcaj/view
- Animal testing: official statistics from the Ministry of Health (2017)
<https://www.lav.it/news/sperimentazione-dati-2017>

VIDEO (Being Animals): laboratory macaques, undercover images never before seen in Italy

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/cbc0ls2ylkb7raz/macachi-laboratorio_essere%20animali.mp4? DI = 0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/cbc0ls2ylkb7raz/macachi-laboratorio_essere%20animali.mp4?DI=0)

(1) Elston, G.N. (2003). Cortex, cognition and the cell: new insights into the pyramidal neuron and prefrontal function. *Cerebral Cortex* 13, 1124-1138.

(2) https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/scientific_committees/scheer/docs/scheer_o_004.pdf

(3) <https://www.ncadierproevenbeleid.nl/documenten/rapport/2016/12/15/ncad-opinion-transition-to-non-animal-research>

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