

Myanmar: palaeontologists must stop buying conflict amber

The conflict in Myanmar, which has devastated the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians, is being bolstered by science. Since 2017, the military has had control of certain mining operations, and has been funding its war complex from the international trade in jade, rubies and amber (go.nature.com/2pnyutf). Buyers of amber include professional and amateur palaeontologists, looking for glimpses of 99-million-year-old specimens from the mid-Cretaceous period entombed inside (J. Sokol *Science* **364**, 722–729; 2019).

In April, the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, based in McLean, Virginia, called on journal editors to boycott submissions relating to amber specimens acquired from Myanmar after June 2017 (go.nature.com/3gtpcs3; Springer Nature is not taking part in this boycott). Some prominent journals have gone further, announcing a moratorium on all research on amber from the nation, regardless of when it was collected (P. M. Barrett and Z. Johanson *J. Syst. Palaeontol.* <http://doi.org/d5qk>; 2020).

A pre-2017 ban would effectively end research programmes based on holdings dating back more than a century, including any future efforts by scholars from Myanmar to study their own palaeontological heritage. I work on such fossil arthropods from museum collections and material donated before the conflict.

A pre-2017 Myanmar moratorium would also be hypocritical: what of collections taken from countries such as

Egypt, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Indonesia during nineteenth-century colonial plunder, still studied today? In my view, researchers must stop acquiring amber from Myanmar until the conflict is resolved. Meanwhile, a practical compromise is for legitimate research on collections built before 2017 to continue.

Most importantly, palaeontologists working outside the nation should help to establish a local scientific community in Myanmar by training and collaborating with the country's scholars, building ties for the peaceful study of their national treasures.

Michael S. Engel University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, USA. msengel@ku.edu

Author declaration: have you considered equity, diversity and inclusion?

To make science more just, there is an instructive rallying cry: 'nothing about us, without us'. We are frequently struck by research and expert commentary about regions or topics that feature no authors with relevant local or lived expertise. Take, for example, remote fieldwork that should be done with scientists on the ground, notably women; or work that is done with locals who go uncredited; or items about diversity that are authored solely by straight, cisgender white men from high-income nations.

We suggest that scientific journals could help to overcome such examples of bias by asking authors to declare whether the conduct of their study considers diversity, equity and inclusion when they submit their papers.

Such a declaration would not serve to force a diverse range

of authors – nobody wants to be the quota author, whether woman, local researcher or both. Instead, it would challenge researchers to consistently consider equity, diversity and inclusion in the planning, realization and publication of their work. This would help them to identify their own biases and so avoid them in the future. It would also give journals more control over possible violations of their code of conduct.

Considering that similar statements are already part of codes of conduct throughout academia (for jobs and conferences, for example), implementing them in the publication process is the next logical step. Scientific journals can help to make science fairer and more inclusive.

Daniela Christina Rößler Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. danielaroessler@fas.harvard.edu

Stefan Lötters, Luis Fernando Marin Da Fonte Trier University, Trier, Germany.

Link Horizon Europe funding to real steps to gender equality

A new European strategy outlines measures to strengthen gender equality in research and innovation (see <https://go.nature.com/3figepu>). It includes the option of requiring action plans from applicants to Horizon Europe – the flagship €81-billion (US\$96-billion) funding programme starting in 2021. The impact of this commendable strategy could be compromised without a framework for comparing plans from different countries and organizations – in terms of their ambition, rigour and real-world impact.

The plans of many European

research organizations for gender equality vary so greatly that they cannot be compared in a standardized manner. Horizon Europe can learn from leading funding bodies in the United Kingdom and Ireland, which require applicants to have achieved a certain level of gender-equality outcomes defined in the Athena SWAN Charter.

Athena SWAN provides a comprehensive framework for planning action based on evidence, a peer-review process to evaluate the rigour of that action, and standardized levels of awards for gender-equality results. Athena SWAN plans, tuned for context, are used in Australia, the United States and Canada. Thus, awards are comparable across settings (E. Kalpazidou Schmidt *et al. Health Res. Policy Syst.* **18**, 19; 2020).

To avoid box-ticking, we urge policymakers to link Horizon Europe funding to requirements for tangible progress in gender equality, built on the Athena SWAN model.

Evanthia Kalpazidou Schmidt* Aarhus University, Denmark. eks@ps.au.dk

Pavel V. Ovseiko* University of Oxford, John Radcliffe Hospital, Oxford, UK.

*Declares competing financial interests: see go.nature.com/3an3mxm