

## New human genetics committee will advise British government

**London.** The British government has agreed to set up an advisory commission on human genetics in response to a report from the House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology, even though it initially rejected the committee's proposal for a statutory committee (see *Nature* 381, 10; 1996).

The new commission will review all aspects of genetics research, as well as its implications for health, insurance, employment and patents. It will also advise on ways of building public confidence in and understanding of genetics, and keep an open door to views from the public. The commission will report chiefly to ministers in the Departments of Health and of Trade and Industry.

The commission will include senior figures from genetics research, industry, public health and possibly the media. It will be expected to take a "broad perspective on the implications of genetics, as distinct from the interests of particular groups", according to a government statement issued on Monday. □

## Plant gene resources reviewed

**Rome.** Delegates from more than 160 countries and 100 non-governmental organizations met in Leipzig, Germany, earlier this week for the twentieth International Technical Conference on Plant Genetic Resources. The week-long conference has been convened to consider and ratify the Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Use of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation is recommending a 20-point action plan estimated to cost between US\$1.3 billion and \$3 billion over ten years. The plan aims to ensure the "conservation of plant genetic resources as a basis for food security,

to promote better utilization of plant genetic resources, and to promote a better sharing of the benefits of plant genetic resources with countries, communities and farmers". The plan will also make the world's 1,308 gene-banks, which collectively store more than six million seed varieties, more secure and effective. □

## Inquiry into Ariane failure

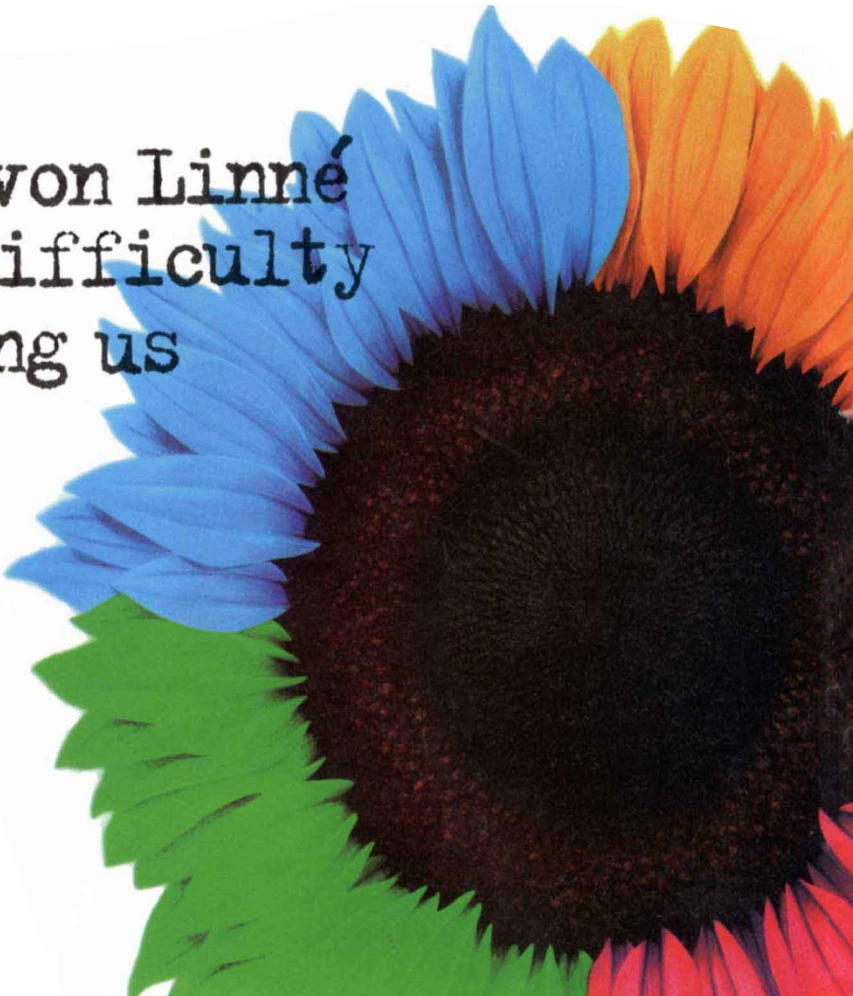
**Paris.** The European Space Agency (ESA) and the French space agency CNES have set up an inquiry into the failure of Ariane-5 flight 501, which was destroyed less than one minute into its maiden flight two weeks ago, after the launcher veered off course. The nine-member board of inquiry is expected to deliver its report by the middle of next month. In addition, ESA and CNES have decided to strengthen the investigatory powers of the Launcher Qualification Review for all launcher elements. □

## Hughes seeks researchers

**Washington.** The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), the largest philanthropic supporter of research in the United States with assets of \$9 billion and outlays last year of \$410 million, has opened a competition to appoint 25-40 new investigators. Nominations for the elite biomedical research positions are invited by September this year, with appointments expected by May 1997. HHMI currently has 280 investigators working at 62 different institutions, in cell biology, genetics, immunology, neuroscience and structural biology. □

## Indian industry ties 'weak'

**New Delhi.** A three-year United Nations study of India's educational institutions and industrial establishments has found the link between the two to be weak enough to cause "a major dysfunctioning of the science and technical education system". To avert this



Even Carl von Linné  
would have difficulty  
classifying us