

United States Senate

January 12, 2024

The Honorable Lonnie Bunch
Secretary
The Smithsonian Institution
P.O. Box 37012, MRC019
Washington, DC 20013-7012

Dear Secretary Bunch:

The Smithsonian Institution plays an important role in the United States as both a museum and an education and research center. It is one of the largest such institutions in the world. As part of its mission, the Smithsonian has entered into various contracts and partnerships with other countries and organizations to advance human knowledge. I am concerned that one such partnership was with the Beijing Genomics Institute (BGI).

In 2020, the Smithsonian Institution reported that it released the genomes of birds representing nearly all avian families.¹ As part of this research program, the Smithsonian worked with BGI, in addition to other Chinese groups. This may have been part of the Global Genome Initiative.

This partnership with BGI is extremely concerning because BGI is a national security risk. BGI is listed on the Department of Defense (DOD) 1260H list, Entities Identified as Chinese Military Companies Operating in the United States.² The Washington Post reports that BGI has been aggressively acquiring genomic information, raising concerns within the intelligence community.³ In 2021, the National Counterintelligence and Security Center issued a warning about BGI and Communist China's genomic data collection activities.⁴

Therefore, please answer the following questions about the Smithsonian's relationship with BGI and other Chinese entities:

¹<https://www.si.edu/newsdesk/releases/scientists-release-genomes-birds-representing-nearly-all-avian-families>

²<https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/05/2003091659/-1/-1/0/1260HCOMPANIES.PDF>

³<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2023/china-dna-sequencing-bgi-covid/>

⁴https://www.dni.gov/files/NCSC/documents/SafeguardingOurFuture/NCSC_China_Genomics_Fact_Sheet_2021revision20210203.pdf

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- How was BGI chosen as a partner with this project? What information was shared with BGI?
- Were any tax dollars given to BGI?
- Will the Smithsonian Institution partner or plan to partner with BGI again?
- Will the Smithsonian Institution partner or plan to partner with any other Chinese firms for other projects or future projects?
- Does the Smithsonian Institution check against the DOD's 1260H list before contracting or partnering with an organization?
- Does the Smithsonian Institution check against the Treasury's Non-SDN Chinese Military Industrial Complex Companies (NS-CMIC) list before contracting or partnering with an organization?
- Does the Smithsonian Institution check against Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) Entity List before contracting or partnering with an organization?
- Is the Smithsonian Institution working with any entity, either parent or subsidiary, of a company on the entity lists kept by the Department of Commerce, DOD, or the Treasury?
- Does the Smithsonian Institution consult with relevant national security federal agencies before entering into partnerships with foreign entities?
- Has the Smithsonian Institution been working with any entity, either parent or subsidiary, of a company on the entity list kept by the Department of Commerce, DOD, or the Treasury, other than BGI?
- Does the Smithsonian Institution capture human genetic data and share it with BGI or foreign firms?

Congress appropriates more than a billion dollars annually to the Smithsonian Institution. It is important that we get the best return on that investment, and that includes making sure we partner with the right organizations to safeguard the data collected; especially the data of American citizens and businesses. I urge you to steer toward partnerships that promote not only our economic growth and increased knowledge, but also protect our investment from misuse by foreign entities outside of the United States.

Sincerely,



Rick Scott

United States Senator