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Professor Matthew S. Meselson
Chairman
AAAS Herbicide Assessment Commission
American Association for the Advancement
of Science
Botanical Museum
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Dear Professor Meselson:

I should like to thank you for your help in increasing my knowledge of the Army's herbicide program and its potential sociological/ecological effects. As you are aware, I share your concern with affects of the use of herbicides, and am anxious to see a reassessment of the program.

Your report to Ambassador Bunker seemed to indicate a need to know in greater detail the long term effects of large scale herbicide usage on animal and plant ecology in MR I. I suspect that the unique tropical climate we have in this region, influenced as it is by both summer and winter monsoons as well as the mountainous, rolling and flat topography, creates many ecological variables. These variables would certainly make a biological study of this region particularly challenging. I regret that the present state of security in the mountains prohibits the kind of thorough study we need.

You may be interested to know that in MR I an initiative has been taken by the XXIV Corps staff to write new restrictive regulations governing herbicide usage. If they are followed faithfully, damage to civilians, their crops, and livestock should be minimal. The new regulations will require that a careful assessment be made at province and region levels of the potential ecological/sociological effects of spraying each target. Information about population density, composition and mores, as well as facts, pertaining to watershed drainage characteristics, vegetation types, livestock, meteorological data in the immediate and surrounding area of the target, is to be provided and

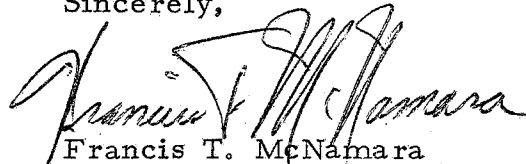
considered before a mission is approved. The disposal of empty barrels used for defoliant and the storage of full barrels of defoliant are to be more carefully safe-guarded to preclude accidental dispersion into the environment.

In the future, crop destruction missions will be confined to the use of a non-persistent herbicide in the mountainous areas now "exclusively" controlled and inhabited by VC or NVA and from which no herbicide would be likely to drift or be carried into a water system inhabited by friendly people. This should reduce adverse affects considerably.

In thinking about the whole question, it seems to me that scientists might help considerably by providing the Army with more information as to the toxicology, degradation products, and persistence of chemicals still in its arsenal. Until the military use of herbicides is banned completely, we should continue to evaluate their biological effects.

Again, many thanks for sending me copies of your very interesting letters to Ambassador Bunker and General Abrams. They contributed significantly to my understanding of the problems associated with the use of herbicides.

Sincerely,



Francis T. McNamara
American Consul