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JUL 11 1971

July 2, 1971

President Richard Nixon
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

You announced, about December 27, 1970, that the herbicide and defoliation program in Vietnam was to be rapidly phased out. As a biologist, concerned about the toxic effects of some herbicides on man, and the grave ecological effects of the use of these agents, I welcomed this decision.

Recently, however, I have seen a DOD memorandum, dated April, 1971, entitled "Background Report on Herbicide Operations in South Vietnam". This states, on its first page: "Responding to Presidential direction in December, 1970, an immediate phase down of other herbicide programs was instituted" (my italics). Has the "phase out" which you directed been changed to a "phase down" by the Department of Defense? Have you approved this important change? I think your original directive for a "phase out" represents the correct and appropriate action.

In the eyes of the great majority of nations of the world, the Geneva Protocol on chemical and biological warfare forbids the use of defoliants and herbicides in war. I believe that any small military advantage that may be gained from continued limited use of herbicides is far more than counterbalanced by the damage done to the authority of the Geneva Protocol. It is a matter of vital national interest to strengthen the Protocol, not to weaken it. This seems to me a compelling argument against the continued use of herbicides in Vietnam, quite apart from potential hazards to the people living in the areas where herbicides are being used. I hope that your directive of December, 1970 for a rapid phase out of the program still holds.

Respectfully yours,

John T. Edsall
Professor of Biochemistry

JTE/jn
cc: Secretary Melvin Laird
Dr. M. S. Meselson