

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

2101 CONSTITUTION AVENUE  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20418

February 27, 1974

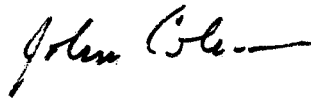
Dr. M. S. Meselson  
The Biological Laboratories  
Harvard University  
16 Divinity Avenue  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

Dear Matt:

Thank you for your letter of February 7 and its enclosure. We had previously been furnished a copy of the November 6 letter and report by AID and, about the same time, a copy of the message from the U. S. Embassy in Saigon reacting to the latter and reporting the action of the Japanese in lifting their embargo.

In the event you do not already have them, I am enclosing a copy of the cable message as well as a copy of Handler's earlier letter to Secretary Kissinger. In light of subsequent developments, Dr. Handler believes a second letter to Kissinger is in order. The material you have provided should be helpful for this purpose.

Sincerely yours,



John S. Coleman

Enclosures

SEE: 1974 File  
AS 60603  
HR 670 8 Jan

December 3, 1973

The Honorable Henry Kissinger  
Secretary of State  
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

For the past 30 months, the National Academy of Sciences has been engaged in a study to assess the effects of the military use in Vietnam of herbicides as defoliating agents and for localized crop destruction. This study was directed by the Congress and supported by an appropriation to the Department of Defense. Our report is nearing completion and should be available to the Secretary of Defense and to the Congress shortly after the first of the year.

Rather late in the study, it became known that an extremely toxic contaminant of the agent 2,4,5-T, an herbicide used extensively by the U.S. forces, had been detected in fish and shellfish in Vietnamese waters in concentrations believed sufficiently high to question their safety for human consumption. This information, based on relatively few samples, has been published in the United States and shortly thereafter, in Vietnam. As a result, there has been widespread alarm that much if not all of the catch from Vietnamese waters may have been made unfit for consumption. As you may know, the Japanese government has impounded all shipments of shrimp from Vietnam pending determination of its safety as a foodstuff.

The toxin in question, TCDD (dioxin), has also been found in commercial 2,4,5-T commonly used in the United States until its ban by action of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1969. Toxic effects of dioxin are said to be manifest after ingesting materials in which it is present in concentrations measured in parts per trillion. Only recently have instrumental methods been developed capable of measurements of this sensitivity.

When the field studies of our Committee were being planned and carried out, information concerning the presence and persistence of dioxin in marine food chains was not known. Indeed, the specific techniques for detection at these low concentrations had not yet been developed. As a result, it has not been possible for our

The Honorable Henry Kissinger  
December 3, 1973  
Page Two

Committee to assess the degree or extent of this herbicide-related hazard. Nevertheless, the hazard could well be serious and indeed is so regarded by knowledgeable individuals in this country as well as in Southeast Asia. We believe that if steps are not taken by the United States to determine whether there does exist a significant and continuing health hazard, we will be subject to severe criticism both internationally and at home.

The present arrangements with DOD do not allow the Academy to carry the matter further. Under Congressional urging, Defense and the Academy have sought the interest of other departments, notably the Agency for International Development and the Department of State, in supporting the necessary investigations. Several interagency meetings have been held to consider this matter, the most recent being on October 25, 1973 at which State was represented by Mr. William Salvon and AID by Messrs. Cobby, Jacobs, and Long. At that meeting it was argued that AID is the logical government entity to provide support for a dioxin sampling and analysis project, that HAS should oversee the sampling in Vietnam and that the National Institute of Environmental Health Laboratory in North Carolina should conduct the analyses of the samples. The cost of such a study was estimated at approximately \$250,000. The group attending agreed that the studies should be carried out as soon as possible for both scientific and political reasons. Our Committee on the Effects of Herbicides in Vietnam has arrived at the same conclusion and will so recommend in its final report to the Congress.

Being convinced of the importance of this sensitive matter, I do hope that you share our deep concern and will take such action as you believe appropriate in light of the circumstances I have outlined above. I can assure you of the interest of the Academy in providing assistance in such ways as you may find helpful.

Sincerely yours,

Philip Handler  
President

cc: Mr. Malcolm E. Carris, DOD  
Mr. Thomas E. Washell, DOD

bcc: Dr. Anton Lang  
Dr. Saunders Mac Lane  
Dr. Philip Ross  
Mr. W. Murray Todd