

Arber

DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



7 Divinity Avenue  
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

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Dr. Werner Arber  
BIOZENTRUM  
Der Universitat Basel  
Abteilung Mikrobiologie  
Klingelbergstrasse 70  
Schweiz/Switzerland

Dear Werner:

Unfortunately, because of previous committments I am unable to attend the COGENE Conference. The most authoratitive person I could suggest is Dr. Robert Mikulak, of the U. S. Arms Control & Disarmament Agency, State Department, Washington, DC 20451.

I enclose for your interest the report of a National Academy panel discussion of possible military use of recombinant DNA research. My view as reflected in that report is that even without recombinant DNA, they are knowledgeable of several micro-organisms that could be used for biological warfare. Therefore, it is not the state of technology, but rather the attitudes, interests, etc. of governments which determines whether or not biological warfare will occur. At present there is an all inclusive treaty, the Biological Weapons Convention of 1972 which prohibits all development, production and use of biological and toxin weapons. This treaty could, in principle, be improved by addition of specific provisions for consultation and reporting in cases of suspected violations. More important at the present time, I believe, is the effort to obtain a treaty prohibiting the development and production and possession of chemical weapons such as nerve gasses. So long as we have no such international convention there will be considerable research and effort devoted to apply our increasingly profound knowledge of life processes to destructive military purposes. Over the long run, such work could lead to serious trouble for man kind as a whole. So I put a good deal of emphasis on obtaining a chemical weapons treaty but at the same time I am cautious about stirring up concern regarding biological weapons because I think we have a biological weapons treaty which is about as good as one can get at present and that excitement in the area of biological weapons could in fact be counter-productive.

Sincerely,

Matthew Meselson  
(Dictated by M. Meselson  
signed in his absence)

MM/db  
Enclosures