

PUGWASH CONFERENCES ON SCIENCE AND WORLD AFFAIRS

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Geneva, 29th January 1988

Ambassador Valentin Falin
Chairman, News Press Agency

MOSCOW
USSR

Dear Ambassador Falin,

I am asking Academician Vitalii Goldanskii to have this letter delivered to you on his return to Moscow tomorrow.

Recently you had an interview with Flora Lewis of the New York Times, of which you probably have a copy. Unfortunately I have not seen the interview in question but I have received alarmed comments from the USA about your reference to "genetic engineering" as one area of development work in weapons that it is in the technical competence of the USSR to develop if desired.

The reference to "genetic engineering" immediately raised the accusation in certain quarters in Washington that the USSR is doing work in "genetic engineering" for the purpose of developing a weapon for biological warfare.

You may recall that last year a similar accusation concerning the AIDS virus was made against the USA by a supposed scientist from the GDR in the Moscow News. I took immediate steps with my friend and colleague Victor Zhdanov, former Director of the Ivanovsky Virological Institute, who died last June, to take steps urgently to deny the legitimacy of such a stupid allegation because of the harm it caused in USA-USSR relations which Pugwash has been trying for over 30 years to improve. Zhdanov took steps to write an article in Pravda (I believe) to point out that the origin of the virus of AIDS was from the African Continent, which most reputable virologists believe. Thus we were able to neutralize at least partially the damage done by the accusation concerning AIDS.

Similarly it would be of great importance to have a denial from you and other responsible quarters in the USSR that USSR has any intention whatsoever to use the science and technology of "genetic engineering" for weapons development or any other harmful purpose, and that the USSR strictly adheres to international norms with respect to work in "genetic engineering".

I am sure you will understand Pugwash's deep concern about this matter and will take prompt steps to remedy the situation.

With cordial personal regards,

Sincerely yours,



Martin M. Kaplan
Secretary-General

cc. Academician V.I. Goldanskii

bcc. Professor Matthew Meselson
Mr. Julian P. Perry Robinson
LO