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Geneva, 28 September 1988

Mr. Mikhail S. Gorbachev
General Secretary of the Central Committee, CPSU
The Kremlin
Moscow - USSR

Dear Secretary-General Mikhail Gorbachev,

This acknowledges with great thanks and appreciation the thoughtful message you sent, which was read by Academician Vitalii Goldanskii, Chairman of the Soviet Pugwash Committee, on the occasion of the opening of the 38th Pugwash Conference in Dagomys, 29 August - 3 September. The message stimulated thoughts and ideas which are reflected in the enclosed report on the Conference, including a special declaration on the urgent problems of the environment.

May I take this opportunity to call your attention to two points, amongst others, that were stressed in a meeting of some of our group with Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Petrovsky in Moscow on 6 September following the Conference in Dagomys. I single out these items because early action on them, we believe, could have very great positive impacts on arms control efforts within a relatively short time.

1. As you no doubt are aware, negotiations for a total ban on chemical weapons are proceeding slowly despite efforts of the USSR in the past two years to hasten achievement of a Chemical Weapons Convention. The slow pace of negotiations is due primarily to the insistence by some nations on completion of fine details of verification of compliance in such a Convention before signature and ratification. Many of these fine details could well await completion following an agreement, but forces hostile to such an agreement could stretch out indefinitely negotiations on such details. Meanwhile chemical weapons have been used in the Iran-Iraq conflict and many other nations, particularly in the Third World, are believed to have taken active steps to add such weapons to their armamentarium since their use in Iran and Iraq has not been penalized by the international community.

Chemical weapons are universally abhorred by civilized humanity. Our suggestion is that the USSR unconditionally and unilaterally renounce their production, use and stockpiling, and declare they will destroy their stocks with inspection open to all states. Such a declaration would be analogous to the one made by President Richard Nixon in 1969, which resulted in the early achievement of a Biological Weapons Convention (1972) now signed and adhered to by over 100 nations.

We are confident that such an unconditional and unilateral renunciation of chemical weapons by the USSR would have a tremendous impact on world opinion and would materially hasten the achievement of a Convention totally banning these dreadful weapons.

2. The outbreak of human anthrax in Sverdlovsk in 1979 has been repeatedly cited until this day by anti-Soviet sources as evidence that the USSR has broken the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention and therefore cannot be trusted to adhere to arms control treaties. For several years Prof. Matthew Meselson, an eminent molecular biologist and geneticist at Harvard University, and I have been working through Pugwash to demonstrate that the Sverdlovsk outbreak was indeed caused by infected meat and not by an explosion in a biological weapons laboratory in Sverdlovsk as alleged officially by the United States Government and others.

It is of interest to note here that Prof. Meselson was primarily responsible for disproving the allegation by the United States Government that "yellow rain" was a chemical warfare agent supplied by the USSR for use in South-East Asia some years ago. Prof. Meselson has twice visited the Soviet Union to forward efforts towards clarifying the cause and nature of the Sverdlovsk incident through open scientific exchanges. His first visit occurred in 1986, kindly assisted by General Nicolai Chervov who was informed about the situation through Pugwash. During his first visit to Moscow in 1986, Prof. Meselson conferred with Dr. P.N. Burgasov, Deputy Minister of Health, Dr. V.N. Nikiforov, an infectious disease specialist, and others who dealt personally with the 1979 anthrax outbreak in Sverdlovsk. He then arranged for Burgasov, Nikiforov and Dr. V.P. Sergiev to come to the USA in April of this year to meet with specialists in epidemiology, infectious diseases and public health. These meetings were highly publicized and did much to dispell suspicions about the 1979 outbreak.

A third and crucial step would be a visit to Sverdlovsk itself by five or six American specialists, including one army infectious disease specialist as part of Prof. Meselson's team. It was tentatively agreed, in meetings Prof. Meselson had with Burgasov and others in Moscow during the first week in September of this year, that such a visit might take place in January 1989. If and when such a visit takes place, it is essential that the Ministries of Health and Defense ensure that the USA team would have access to all relevant information. We are confident that the result of such a visit would effectively eliminate harmful references to the 1979 outbreak that is being exploited by certain groups in the West, and which serves as a continuing hindrance to the achievement of arms control treaties with the USSR.

Respectfully yours,



Martin M. Kaplan
Secretary-General

c.c. : General Nikolai Chervov
Academician V.I. Goldanskii
Deputy Minister Vladimir Petrovsky