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DEPARTMENT OF BIOCHEMISTRY AND MOLECULAR BIOLOGY
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22 January 1992

Dr. Alexei V. Yablokov
State Counselor on Ecology and Health Care
Moscow
FAX (7-095) 134-44-21

Dear Dr. Yablokov,

I was very glad to read in an English translation of the November 13 issue of Literaturnaya Gazeta that you have undertaken an official study of the origins of the 1979 epidemic of anthrax in Sverdlovsk, now Yekaterinburg.

I am writing to ask if I might discuss this problem with you in Moscow, to be of whatever assistance I can to your study and also because of my own long-standing interest.

I could come to Moscow nearly any time in the month of June that might be convenient for you. On the same trip I would also like to visit Yekaterinburg itself. If you should be in the U.S. before June, I would be most grateful for the opportunity to talk with you in this country.

Actually, we have already met -- when delegations from the Soviet and US academies met to discuss biological arms control in Washington and Maryland in May 1988. I am afraid that I particularly remember the very loud jazz music that made conversation impossible when some members of the group went for dinner to the "Blues Alley" in Georgetown!

If I come to Russia in June, I would like to bring two or three colleagues who have also studied the anthrax problem, and in whom I have high confidence as thoughtful and objective scholars. One of them, Dr. Alexis Shelokov, was also a member of the US National Academy delegation during your 1988 visit and was with Drs. Burgasov, Nikiforov and Sergiev when they visited the U.S. in April 1988. Dr. Shelokov is Director of Medical Affairs of the Salk Institute Government Services Division, in Swiftwater Pennsylvania. I would also be accompanied by Professor Jeanne Guillemain, of the Department of Sociology at Boston College, who is also my wife. She too participated in the 1988 visit of the three Russian physicians

and specializes in medical sociology. The third colleague is Dr. Martin Hugh-Jones, Professor in the Department of Epidemiology and Community Health, School of Veterinary Medicine, Louisiana State University. Dr. Hugh-Jones is Director of the World Health Organization Collaborative Center and a member of the WHO Working Group on Anthrax Control and Research. I have a small grant from the MacArthur Foundation to study the 1979 epidemic from which I will be able to cover our travel expenses and ordinary living expenses in Russia for a week or two.

Whatever your response to this proposal, I am very glad to know that you are doing this work, since a true understanding of what happened will require not only access to records and personal testimony but also a sound knowledge of a broad combination of scientific disciplines. Many published claims about the epidemic, on both sides of the controversy, suffer from ignorance of the relevant microbiology, ecology, epidemiology and pathology of anthrax specifically and of infectious disease outbreaks generally. Anthrax is still a serious hazard in many countries. An understanding of the 1979 outbreak, whatever its cause may have been, is therefor certain to be of much value.

I look forward to your reply. My FAX number is (617) 495-8308.

With best regards

Sincerely,



Matthew Meselson
Professor of Biochemistry and
Molecular Biology