

9 January 1966

Dr. Marshall Gates
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Dear Marshall:

I naturally welcomed your signature and those of your colleagues on the petition concerning chemical and biological warfare.

I fully appreciate the attitude of those who are reluctant to sign such a petition, on the ground that it is illogical simply to condemn this type of warfare. Tear gas, and some of the other gases that we have used in Vietnam seem like a very innocuous weapon. Napalm, on the other hand, is to my mind a truly horrible weapon. I have a medical degree and have worked with patients who have been burned, and the thought of what napalm does to people is sickening to me. I believe however that the emphasis on holding the line against the use of chemical and biological weapons is enormously important. Once you start using the weapons that seem so mild I can see no way of drawing a clearcut line and saying "Here we stop; we will use nothing more deadly than this." We will have started on the road that may lead us to the use of terrible weapons of mass destruction, and to their use against us by our enemies, who will say that we taught them that this is the thing to do.

Also the use of defoliants for crop destruction, as pointed out by my colleague Jean Mayer in a letter in SCIENCE April 15, 1966, is primarily and selectively an attack on the civilian population and particularly on the children. This point is developed further in an article by Jean Mayer and Victor Sidel in the CHRISTIAN CENTURY of June 29, 1966, and their argument seems to me utterly compelling. I think that the deep instinctive repugnance that most people feel towards such practices is fully justified by the facts.

Of course I believe that all war is hideous, and that in our time the continuance of the practice of warfare is becoming an intolerable threat to the whole future of

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mankind. To abolish war and to establish a world order that will enforce the abolition of war are, to my mind, primary goals for which we must strive. I think we all agree that we must make particular efforts to hold the line against the possibility of nuclear warfare. Chemical and biological warfare poses a somewhat lesser, but still a very terrible threat. Until we can stop warfare altogether I want to see the barriers to the use of weapons of this sort maintained and strengthened.

I doubt if there are any real points of disagreement between us on these issues. However several people have written to me concerning our petition, expressing similar feelings of uneasiness to those mentioned in your letter. Since I share many of these feelings myself I have written this in the hope of clarifying the basis for my own stand in the matter.

Best wishes for the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

John T. Edsall