

President Lyndon B. Johnson
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

We, the American scientists whose names appear below, wish to warn against any weakening of the world-wide prohibitions and restraints on the use of chemical and biological (CB) weapons.

CB weapons have the potential of inflicting, especially on civilians, enormous devastation and death which may be unpredictable in scope and intensity; they could become far cheaper and easier to produce than nuclear weapons, thereby placing great mass destructive power within reach of nations not now possessing it; they lend themselves to use by leadership that may be desperate, irresponsible, or unscrupulous. The barriers to the use of these weapons must not be allowed to break down.

During the Second World War, the United States maintained a firm and clearly stated policy of not initiating the use of CB weapons. However, in the last few years the U.S. position has become less clear. Since the late 1950's, Defense Department expenditures on CB weapons have risen several fold — and there has been no categorical reaffirmation of the World War II policy.

Most recently, U.S. forces have begun the large-scale use of anti-crop and "non-lethal" anti-personnel chemical weapons in Vietnam. We believe that this sets a dangerous precedent, with long term hazards far outweighing any probable short term military advantage. The employment of any one CB weapon weakens the barriers to the use of others. No lasting distinction seems feasible between incapacitating and lethal weapons or between chemical and biological warfare. The great variety of possible agents forms a continuous spectrum from the temporarily incapacitating to the highly lethal. If the restraints on the use of one kind of CB weapon are broken down, the use of others will be encouraged.

Therefore, Mr. President, we urge that you

- Institute a White House study of overall government policy regarding CB weapons and the possibility of arms control measures, with a view to maintaining and reinforcing the world-wide restraints against CB warfare.
- Order an end to the employment of anti-personnel and anti-crop chemical weapons in Vietnam.
- Reestablish and categorically declare the intention of the United States to refrain from initiating the use of chemical and biological weapons.