

August 12, 1969

Mrs. Martha Mills
League of Women Voters of the
United States
10th Floor
1730 M Street
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mrs. Mills:

On the advice of Mrs. Bruce B. Benson, I am writing to suggest that the League of Women Voters take up for discussion the problem of chemical and biological warfare and specifically the question of whether or not the United States should ratify the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the prohibition of gas and germ warfare. A copy of the Geneva Protocol and a list of its adherents is enclosed. For background information, I also enclose a copy of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on chemical and biological warfare in which I participated last April 30.

As you know, there has been considerable recent interest in the problems posed by chemical and biological weapons. In April, the President ordered a full scale review of our CBW programs and policies including the question of possible ratification of the Geneva Protocol. It is an ironic fact that the Protocol was promulgated at Geneva in 1925 on the insistence of the United States but that the Senate never voted its advice and consent to ratification. Meanwhile, over sixty nations have become parties to the Protocol including all other members of NATO but ourselves and all members of the Warsaw Pact. Aside from ourselves, all nuclear powers are party to the treaty including Communist China. Many nations have ratified the Protocol since World War II, the most recent being Syria and Israel, both of whom ratified within the past year.

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At the United Nations, the United States has given its strong support to the Geneva Protocol. In 1966 we co-authored a resolution passed without dissenting vote by the General Assembly, calling for strict observance of the Protocol and inviting all nations to become parties. We also voted for a similar resolution at the United Nations in 1968. The latter resolution requested the Secretary-General to prepare with the assistance of qualified experts a report on chemical and biological weapons. This has now been done. The report issued July 1, 1969 was prepared by experts representing a number of nations including the United States. In his forward to the report, U Thant urges all states to accede to the Geneva Protocol and to make a clear affirmation that the Protocol applies to the use in war of all chemical and biological agents without exception. He also calls for agreement to halt the development, production and stockpiling of CB weapons.

There is a great need for better public understanding of the far-reaching issues associated with the Geneva Protocol and its ramifications, especially now that our government has embarked on a full-scale review with rapidly building interest in the Congress. The League could contribute a great deal by introducing this subject in its discussions. Perhaps this could be done as part of the continuing support of the League for the United Nations. Perhaps there is another way that would be more appropriate.

For further information on this subject, you might contact the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in Washington. You might also wish to obtain further information from the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs and I would be glad to help in any way I can.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Meselson
Professor of Biology

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Encl.

cc: Mrs. Bruce B. Benson
Miss Jane Zoba