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Ford Favors CIA Links to Clergymen

Washington

President Ford favors continued contacts by the Central Intelligence Agency with foreign clergymen and U.S. missionaries abroad, a White House official said in a letter made public yesterday.

"The President does not feel it would be wise at present to prohibit the CIA from having any connection with the clergy," chief White House counsel Philip W. Buchen said in the letter to Senatre Mark Hatfield (Rep-Ore.)

In releasing the Buchen letter, Hatfield contended that the use of churchmen by intelligence agents dishonors America and should be stopped.

Hatfield made public an exchange of correspondence involving himself, Buchen and CIA Director William E. Colby.

Buchen, stating the President's position, told Hatfield in a letter dated November 5:

"Clergymen throughout the world are often valuable sources of intelligence and many clergymen, motivated solely by patriotism, voluntarily and willingly aid the government in providing information of intelligence value."

In a letter to Colby, Hatfield said he believes even a few CIA contacts with church people overseas tend to taint all such activities and jeopardize the work of missionaries.

Colby disagreed, saying: "In many countries of the world representatives of the clergy, foreign and local, play a significant role and can be of assistance to the United States through CIA with no reflection upon their integrity nor their mission."

"Thus I believe that any sweeping prohibition such as you suggest would be a mistake and impose a handicap on this agency which would reduce its future effectiveness to a degree not warranted by the real facts of the situation," Colby told Hatfield in a letter.

Hatfield, a religious activist who has long been associated with church groups, is introducing legislation to ban contacts between the CIA and missionaries.

The senator said the ban would be similar to one now in effect for U.S. Peace Corps volunteers and Fulbright scholars overseas.