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NY TIMES

Defoliants and Gases

To the Editor:

While we applaud the removal of U. S. forces from Cambodia, it is deeply disturbing that the use of defoliants in Vietnam is likely to be resumed at the same time. Your news story on June 23 reported that the use of these agents had been suspended because of the diversion of the C-123 spray planes to Cambodian transport operations, but might be resumed after June 30.

Over six months have passed since President Nixon renounced the first use of chemical weapons by the United States and stated that he would submit to the Senate for its ratification the Geneva Protocol of 1925 which prohibits first use of these weapons.

During this period the General Assembly of the United Nations has by a vote of 80 to 3 formally declared that harassing chemical agents (tear and nausea gases) and herbicides (defoliants) are indeed chemical weapons and are included under the Protocol. Yet the United States continues to use tear and nausea gases in Vietnam, has only halted the use of herbicides temporarily, and the Protocol has not yet been submitted to the Senate.

Continued use by the United States, and continued delay in ratification of the Protocol, weaken its proscription against chemical weapons, which has had a remarkable degree of compliance since 1925. "No gas" is easy to understand; "some gas" opens the door to a host of horror weapons waiting in the wings.

We urge immediate cessation of the use of these weapons (as well, of course, as immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Vietnam—but that is another issue), prompt submission of the Protocol to the Senate for ratification, and the clear statement by President Nixon that tear gases and herbicides are included in the provisions of the Protocol and in United States policy on chemical weapons.

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