

## Manmade Wasteland in Vietnam

Investigators from the American Association for the Advancement of Science have produced shocking new evidence of the devastating effects of United States military crop-spraying on the land and people of South Vietnam.

A study team organized by Dr. Matthew S. Meselson, a Harvard biologist, reports that at least a fifth of the 1.2 million acres of mangrove forest in South Vietnam has been "utterly destroyed," leaving a manmade wasteland that appears incapable of producing new vegetation. Enough food to feed 600,000 people for a year has been destroyed as well as a half-billion dollars' worth of prime hardwood.

The study team did not attempt to assess possible military benefits from the crop-spraying program. But it should be self-evident that there can be neither moral nor military justification for an operation that systematically destroys the land and damages the people it is intended to help save.

It is not enough to promise to "phase out" this unconscionable practice, as the White House did last weekend in apparent anticipation of the scientists' report. The evidence clearly calls for an immediate halt to the use of all herbicides in Vietnam and for urgent measures to try to rectify the harm already done.

It would, moreover, be much in order for President Nixon to reconsider the reservation on the use of herbicides which he attached to the Geneva Protocol of 1925 when he submitted it to the Senate for ratification last summer. The evidence from Vietnam vindicates the judgment of an overwhelming majority in the United Nations General Assembly that herbicides should be included in this general ban on the use of chemical and biological weapons.

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