Thirty-sixth session
FIRST COMMITTEE
Agenda item 42 (b)

CHEMICAL AND BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) WEAPONS

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

Letter dated 3 December 1981 from the Permanent Representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the text of a letter from the Permanent Mission of the USSR to the United Nations concerning alleged cases of the use of chemical and toxin weapons in countries of South-East Asia and in Afghanistan.

I should be grateful if you would have this letter circulated as an official General Assembly document under item 42 (b) entitled "Chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons: report of the Secretary-General" of the agenda of the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.

(Signed) O. TROYANOVSKY
Annex

The Permanent Mission of the USSR to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to inform him of the following.

The representatives of the United States of America in various United Nations bodies have recently circulated allegations to the effect that cases of the use of chemical and toxin weapons have taken place in countries of South-East Asia and in Afghanistan. In this connexion, irresponsible references are being made, directly or indirectly, to some kind of participation by the Soviet Union in the alleged violations of the 1925 Geneva Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or Other Gases and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare and of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. Those making such allegations, which they know to be false, offer as the basis for them totally unsupported "reports" in the press and other mass information media, and more recently "physical evidence" allegedly obtained by United States specialists in South-East Asia. Although such allegations, designed to cast doubt on the Soviet Union's compliance with its obligations under international agreements concerning the limitation of weapons, are absolutely without foundation, a noisy propaganda campaign has been developed around this artificially created "question". It is noteworthy that high-ranking representatives of the United States administration have taken part in this campaign.

No actual materials of any kind are exhibited to support the so-called "reports" concerning the use of chemical weapons. These "reports" are inherently absurd and do not stand the test of elementary scientific analysis. And although the "reports" usually indicate the time, place and various circumstances of the alleged cases of chemical attack in Afghanistan, Laos and Kampuchea, any elementary analysis with the least degree of objectivity demonstrates the mendacious and slanderous character of these "facts".

In spite of the "abundance of witnesses" to the alleged use of chemical weapons, there has been no exhibition of any physical evidence (structural parts of ammunition, containers, fragments and the like) to indicate such use. The groundlessness of the "reports" of mythical cases of the use of chemical weapons by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan is further demonstrated by the testimony of J.-M. Monod, leader of the delegation of the International Committee of the Red Cross at Peshawar, Pakistan, who has stated that ICRC doctors have never encountered a single patient exhibiting any signs of the effect of toxic substances (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 22 October 1981).

In the light of the foregoing, it is quite natural that even the United Nations Group of Experts which carried out an investigation of the "reports" concerning the use of chemical weapons "found itself unable to reach a final conclusion as to whether or not chemical warfare agents had been used". The
experts recognized that "the Group was unable to detect signs and symptoms which would be suggestive of exposure to chemical warfare agents" (A/36/613, 20 November 1981)

An indirect acknowledgement that the "reports" on the use of chemical weapons by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan and by Viet Nam in Laos and Kampuchea are without any foundation is contained in the note verbae dated 14 September 1981 from the Permanent Representative of the United States addressed to the Secretary-General, in which she states that even United States experts who had studied the matter reached the conclusion "that no known traditional chemical warfare agent alone or in combination with others could produce all of the symptoms described or cause death to occur as rapidly as has been reported" (A/36/509, 15 September 1981).

Obviously, this circumstance forced the authors of the "reports" on the use of chemical weapons to engage in the search for new "arguments" that would render their fabrications more plausible. Consequently, the above-mentioned note of 14 September 1981 from the United States, communicating the results of the tests supposed to have been carried out in the area of the Kampuchean-Thai border, trots out a version about the use in that area of toxins of the trichothecene group. It is also alleged that the level of the substances tested, which are naturally produced by fusarium fungi, were nearly 20 times greater than the level occurring as a result of natural intoxication, and that they "do not occur" naturally in warm climates, yet facilities needed to produce them artificially do not exist in South-East Asia. The authors of this document undoubtedly know that in particular areas of South-East Asia the natural level of intoxication by mycotoxins of the trichothecene group has not yet been studied, and that this level, may be hundreds or thousands of times higher or lower, depending on the particular conditions.

The significance of the conclusions drawn by the United States State Department is being questioned by specialists in the United States itself. As reported, for example, in the Washington Post dated 23 September 1981, the vegetation used in the tests could have been contaminated by fungus spores, while the toxin content could increase while being transported. On the other hand, the newspaper points out that the possibility of natural contamination by T-2 toxin in Asia was hardly studied previously. As for the toxin itself, according to the newspaper it is widely used in the United States itself for research purposes and maybe sent in the mail. It is quite clear that such a system of transportation could not occur in the case of highly toxic substances intended for use in warfare. Finally, in the afore-mentioned report of the Group of Experts, which was distributed two months after the issuance of the "version" concerning the trichothecene toxins states that, among the persons interviewed by it, the Group had been unable to detect signs and symptoms which would be suggestive of exposure to chemical warfare agents. Even in the case of those persons who had claimed that they had walked through an area contaminated by "yellow powder", no clear characteristic findings of exposure to chemical agents could be recorded. Thus, the usual attempt to prove the unprovable is again based on fantasy and does not stand up to any criticism.
Thus, not a single one of the procedures designed to provide evidence of the use of chemical weapons has been substantiated by the slenderest of facts. The impression is created that this does not greatly concern the authors of the "reports". As for the substance of the "reports", their absurdity may be illustrated by a couple of examples.

Specifically, one of the descriptions of the effects of the use of chemical weapons makes it necessary to draw the conclusion that the alleged substances used simultaneously capable of producing nerve paralysis, skin blisters, suffocation and incapacitation, that they can cause prolonged hemorrhage even after the death of the victims, affect the skin and tissues only in specific places, possess phytotoxic properties, and so on, although it is well known to science the world over that substances which possess such complex properties do not exist in nature.

No less untenable in this context are the "reports" about the physical properties of poisonous substances which apparently are able spontaneously to change from a compound liquid state to a solid state and then into a gas.

It is also well known that the United States itself resorted to the widespread use of chemical weapons in the course of the aggression which it unleashed in South-East Asia.

On 23 September 1981, Mr. R. Schweiker, United States Secretary for Health and Social Services, officially confirmed the facts concerning the widespread use of chemicals by the United States in Viet Nam. It was acknowledged that the victims comprised not only the Vietnamese inhabitants but also a large number of United States army personnel who took part in the fighting. In particular, it was officially announced, for the first time at the governmental level that over 45 million litres of various chemical compounds were sprayed in aerosol form over the territory of Viet Nam during the war. In total, according to Mr. Schweiker's statement, several hundred special air operations were conducted over Viet Nam, using toxic chemicals. During the spraying, it was not only innocent Vietnamese civilians and Vietnamese troops who fell victim to the effect of the chemicals, but also a significant proportion of the United States army personnel, who were not informed of the harmful effects of contact with those chemicals. Even after many years, United States service personnel complain of their health and the health of their children because of that heinous crime.

According to the United States Department of Health, various complaints of illness were filed with the Veterans Administration by 1,200 air force personnel who had carried out operational assignments in connexion with the spraying of chemical compounds, as well as 60,000 members of the land forces who fell victim to local contamination. Most of them complain of a sudden worsening of their health, the appearance of the so-called chlorine rash and malignant growths on the skin, severe headaches, hepatitis, gastrointestinal diseases, impaired co-ordination of movements and an increase in the number of cancers.

However, the information provided by Mr. Schweiker does not reveal the full picture of the actual scale of the chemical war waged by the United States in

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Viet Nam. Fuller information on the extent of the use of chemical weapons by the United States is contained in documents of the international scientific conference held in Paris in 1970, with the participation of chemical weapons experts from many countries of the world, including the United States. Reference to the use of chemicals by the United States in Viet Nam, Laos and Kampuchea was also made in the memorandum dated 20 March 1980 from the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam circulated as a document of the Committee on Disarmament (CD/82). According to the far from complete data, the United States used more than 100,000 tons of chemicals in South Viet Nam alone during the war. More than 43 per cent of the area of arable land and about 44 per cent of the forests were affected several times by contaminating compounds. Seventy per cent of the coconut plantations and 150,000 hectares of tropical vegetation were destroyed.

More than 2 million Vietnamese fell victim to the chemical warfare, 3,500 of whom died, while the others are still suffering from its effects. United States chemical weapons were also widely used, without limitation and without even a thought for existing international laws, in Kampuchea and Laos. In Kampuchea alone, up to 85 per cent of the forests were affected and more than 50 per cent of the animals died from its effects, while thousands of Kampucheans are suffering from various diseases caused by poisonous substances. Furthermore, the attempts to submit that the Soviet Union is involved in the use of toxic substances in Afghanistan are utterly absurd. Such fabrications are clearly designed to try to divert attention from the widely-known facts concerning the supply of American-produced chemical ammunition to bands invading Afghan territory from outside.

The Government of Afghanistan has repeatedly provided the international community with factual information on the use of chemical weapons by bands of Afghan counter-revolutionaries, who in fact are maintained by the Americans. These chemical weapons were prepared in the United States and dispatched to Afghanistan, where they were used by bandits against innocent civilians and school children and to poison animals. Here is merely one of the many facts. On 25 March 1980, in the Herat province of Afghanistan, there was an armed clash between a patrol unit of the armed forces of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and one of the diversionary bands that had infiltrated from abroad. After the band had been routed, among the weapons captured were chemical hand grenades. The Government of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan carefully investigated the case, and the materials of the investigation were made the subject of a special government statement (of 11 April 1980); subsequently, samples of American-produced chemical ammunition seized during the defeat of the band were shown at a press conference in Kabul to representatives of a number of international organizations and foreign journalists.

The real intentions of the authors of the outlandish fabrications directed against the Soviet Union are not only to blind the public to the United States widespread use of chemical weapons against the peoples of Indo-China, but also to create a more favourable climate for that country's extensive preparations for modernizing its capacity to wage chemical warfare. According to chemical weapons experts, the United States already possesses the world's largest arsenal of...
chemical weapons. The stockpiles of toxic substances of the sarin and VX-2 type come to 45-55 thousand tons. United States warehouses in the United States, Europe, Japan and the Pacific hold more than 3 million rounds of chemical ammunition, totalling more than 150,000 tons. United States army weapons include more than 90 different types of chemical ammunition.

In order to expand this arsenal even further, the United States decided to build a new plant in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, for the production of a completely new generation of chemical weapons, the binary ones. The United States armed forces already possess 155-mm binary artillery shells ("sarin-2"). The development of a 200-203.2-mm binary artillery shell (the VX-2) is being completed. When the new plant is finished and put into operation the United States will possess new chemical ammunition for basic artillery systems, Big Eye airborne chemical bombs, Lance tactical binary missile warheads, winged missiles and spraying devices and cassettes. There are plans to increase chemical ammunition stockpiles from 3 million to 5 million units and to modernize and substantially expand the chemical weapon warehousing capacity. The cost of implementing plans for re-arming the United States with chemical weapons is estimated at $4 billion.

In the light of the foregoing, the sheer absurdity of the fiction that the Soviet Union is part of some alleged plan to use chemical and toxic weapons becomes transparent. This slanderous propaganda campaign is designed to undermine international disarmament agreements and shows that those who spread such falsehoods do not want to solve the problems which are really crucial to arms limitation and to averting the threat of war. Those unwarranted assertions of the Americans and the way they are made show that Washington is motivated not by a desire to consolidate existing arms limitation and disarmament agreements or to achieve further progress in that area, but, to judge from the whole picture, by precisely the opposite.

The Soviet Union is unswerving in its support of the immediate and complete outlawing of chemical weapons. As far back as 1969, the Soviet Union joined the other socialist countries in submitting for discussion in international forums a specific draft convention on the prohibition of chemical and bacteriological weapons. When the General Assembly adopted a decision on the signing of a convention prohibiting only bacteriological weapons, the USSR in 1972 joined the other socialist countries in submitting to the Committee on Disarmament a specific draft convention on the prohibition of the development, production and stockpiling of chemical weapons and their destruction. The draft of this convention is still on the negotiating table in the Committee on Disarmament. Since 1976 the USSR has been conducting active bilateral negotiations with the United States on that issue but through no fault of its own, in 1980 those negotiations were broken off by the Americans, who have since shown no readiness to resume them.

The Soviet Mission to the United Nations takes the occasion to stress again the willingness of the USSR to resume immediately the Soviet-American negotiations on the prohibition of chemical weapons and to take an active part in multilateral efforts in that area in the Committee on Disarmament.