

tion.³ We are, therefore, taking steps to insure that this evidence is called to the attention of states and that it is provided to both the Secretary General of the United Nations and to the group of experts investigating this problem under his auspices. Tomorrow, in my capital, the United States will have more to say on this subject.

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Press Statement by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Stoessel): Reported Use of Chemical Weapons, September 14, 1981¹

Yesterday in Berlin, Secretary Haig recalled² that the United States, along with many other members of the world community, has been for some time concerned over reports of use of lethal chemical weapons in Afghanistan and Southeast Asia. He announced that the U.S. Government now had physical evidence from Southeast Asia found to contain three potent toxic agents.

As Secretary Haig promised, we are taking steps to provide this information to the world community through the United Nations, its member governments, and through the representatives of the national and international press here today.

Reports of the use of chemical warfare agents in Southeast Asia date back to 1976. The United States has publicly expressed its concern about these events on numerous occasions over these years. We have privately and formally expressed our concern to the Soviet, Vietnamese, and Laotian Governments, only to be told that our concerns are unfounded.

In June 1980, we prepared a 125-page compendium of reports of chemical weapons use, and we used that compendium as a basis for supporting the December 1980 U.N. resolution to establish an impartial international investigation into reports of chemical weapons use. We followed that with an update to the compendium in March 1981.

After earlier unsuccessful attempts to obtain physical evidence of chemical weapons use, we have recently uncovered significant, though preliminary, information to demonstrate clearly that our concerns were entirely justified.

Specifically, we believe we have obtained good evidence that rather than a traditional lethal chemical agent, three potent and lethal mycotoxins of the trichothecene group have been used. A mycotoxin is a poison typically produced in nature by living organisms. Analysis of a leaf and stem sample from Kampuchea has revealed high levels of lethal mycotoxins of the trichothecene group. The levels detected were up to 20 times greater than any recorded natural outbreak.

³ Printed *ibid.*, 1972, pp. 133-138.

¹ *Department of State Bulletin*, Nov. 1981, p. 79.

² *Supra.*

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Since normal background levels of these toxins are essentially undetect-
 able, the high levels found are considered to be abnormal, and it is highly
 unlikely that such levels could have occurred in a natural intoxication. In
 point of fact, these mycotoxins do not occur naturally in Southeast Asia.

The possession and use of toxins is a violation of both the 1925 Geneva
 protocol³ and the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention,⁴ as well as the rules
 of customary international law of armed conflict.

Over the past several years, a number of medical doctors working on this
 problem have visited Southeast Asia. They visited the borders in question,
 interviewed and examined refugees, reviewed medical records including
 public health data, and spoke directly with eyewitnesses to events in both
 Laos and Kampuchea.

Detailed analyses of this and other information leads us to conclude that
 mycotoxins, not traditional chemical warfare agents, produced the bizarre
 effects which caused the reported deaths. The test results we have recently
 obtained, together with the information provided by the physicians who
 have visited Southeast Asia, represent strong and compelling, but
 nonetheless preliminary, evidence that the lethal agents used are myco-
 toxins.

I want to caution you that there are certainly other agents being used that
 we have not yet identified. Incapacitating and riot control agents, as well as
 other possible lethal agents, may be involved.

We are attempting to obtain additional information from Laos and Kam-
 puchea in an effort to obtain corroborative evidence. We are sharing this in-
 formation with the U.N. group of experts investigating chemical weapons
 use, as well as our friends and allies throughout the world.

The United States believes that in the light of this new information, in-
 creased efforts must be made to visit the regions where chemical attacks are
 being reported. We have, therefore, urged the Secretary General's group of
 experts to take steps immediately to visit refugee camps and the areas of
 reported attacks in Kampuchea and the other regions in question to obtain
 testimony firsthand from eyewitnesses and victims of attacks, medical per-
 sonnel, officials of refugee organizations, and any other evidence available.

We have also urged that the utmost effort be made to contact and obtain
 testimony from the many victims and eyewitnesses who have departed the
 refugee camps and started new lives elsewhere.

³ The protocol may be found in *Documents on Disarmament, 1969*, pp. 764-765.

⁴ Printed *ibid.*, 1972, pp. 133-138.