



communiqué

N°: 98
No.:

DIFFUSION: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
RELEASE: JUNE 21, 1982

ALLEGED USE OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Mark MacGuigan, announced today that Canada is submitting to the UN Secretary General an independent report on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia.

This report has been prepared by Dr. Bruno Schiefer, Chairman of the Toxicology Group, University of Saskatchewan, who was invited by the Department of External Affairs in February 1982 to undertake a scientific study of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia, in particular the use of mycotoxins as a lethal agent. Dr. Schiefer is recognized as one of the foremost experts on toxicology (mycotoxins) in Canada. Dr. MacGuigan made his announcement in Bangkok, Thailand at the conclusion of a two-day official visit during which the subject of the alleged use of chemical weapons in Laos and Cambodia was discussed with Thai authorities.

Canada has been concerned with the alleged use of chemical weapons in Laos and Cambodia since reports of the use of some sort of lethal or incapacitating agents began to be received from Laotian refugees in Thailand in 1976. In addition to humanitarian concerns, Canada has been concerned with the credibility of the 1925 Geneva Protocol which prohibits the use of chemical weapons. To ensure that the extensive reports of the use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia were investigated, Canada co-sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution in 1980 which established an international group of experts to investigate these reports, and a subsequent resolution in 1981 which extended the group's mandate. In March 1981, Canada had submitted to the UN Secretary-General information volunteered by refugees in Thailand on the alleged use of chemical weapons.

Dr. Schiefer's report is based on the results of a two-week visit to Thailand in February where he held discussions with Thai government authorities, Thai scientists, and Canadian Embassy officials, in addition to visiting refugee camps on the Laotian and Cambodian borders with Thailand, where he collected control samples and conducted interviews with victims of alleged attacks. His report concludes that events which are reported to have taken place at the time of alleged chemical weapons attacks cannot be explained on the basis of naturally occurring phenomena. Neither mycotoxins nor diseases naturally occurring in Southeast Asia can explain the reported symptoms of victims of the alleged chemical weapons attacks. The symptoms described, however, are consistent with tricothecene mycotoxicosis. The UN Experts' Group is to report to the General Assembly in the fall and it is hoped that Dr. Schiefer's report will provide a valuable scientific contribution to its work. In particular, Dr. Schiefer's report should serve to answer the many scientific questions that have been posed, particularly by the Soviet Union, regarding the natural occurrence of mycotoxins in Southeast Asia.

Dr. Schiefer's report, in its final conclusion, identifies an urgent need to improve the verification and control procedures for chemical and/or biological weapons in order to determine if they are being used in Southeast Asia. Canada fully supports the conclusions of Dr. Schiefer's report. Canada intends to continue to make submissions to the United Nations.