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LETTER DATED 2 AUGUST 1964 FROM THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIET-NAM ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE
SECURITY COUNCIL

By cable dated 28 July 1964 the Cambodian Minister for Foreign Affairs protested to the Security Council of the United Nations against the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam which he accuses of violating Khmer air space and dumping toxic powder on limitrophe villages in the province of Rattanakiri. These incidents are said to have occurred on 13 and 20 June and 9, 17, 20, 21, 22 and 23 July 1964. Seventy-six persons are said to have succumbed, domestic animals perished and plants withered.

I should like to point out, if I may, that this unfounded Cambodian protest will not surprise informed circles. My Government categorically denies this untoward and slanderous accusation while expressing its indignation and dismay.

International opinion will not have forgotten how it was once before psychologically poisoned by a similar campaign about so-called bacteriological warfare for which communist China blamed the free world at the time of the Korean War.

Such a propaganda method, which is as machiavellian as the ends it serves, is harmful to world peace and hinders in particular relations between neighbouring countries such as Cambodia and Viet-Nam. It is hardly necessary to say that this method has always found a willing audience in the communist countries such as People's China and North Viet-Nam. In the present political context the Cambodian protest might lead to misunderstanding and aggravation of the already tense international situation.

My Government requests that a scientist of repute be appointed or an international commission of observers and experts established to hold an investigation on the spot in order to clarify this matter which, if it were true, could not fail to touch the conscience of mankind.

By way of documentation, the facts are set forth here below together with certain observations thereon:

(1) No air mission of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Viet-Nam took place at any locality in the three Vietnamese provinces of Pleici, Kentum and Darlac which are situated close to the Cambodian province of Rattanakiri on the dates stated in the aforementioned Cambodian cable of protest dated 28 July 1964.

(2) Since 1960 the Armed Forces of the Republic of Viet-Nam have indeed been using a chemical product for defoliation purposes in certain areas of dense vegetation where the Viet Cong mounted ambushes to attack our regular armed forces and destroy certain road and rail networks. This new tactic has enabled our security forces to carry out counter-attacks, and thus by the end of 1963 Viet Cong sabotage acts had been reduced by 70 per cent in comparison with previous years.

(3) The chemical product in question is not the one alluded to in the Cambodian Note which describes it as a yellow toxic powder.

In fact it is a deep purple liquid which the United States, Russia and other European countries have been using for a long time in gardening to destroy weeds and plant parasites. This chemical product, the formula of which and its use are well known to the public, is easy to obtain in shops and has not so far caused fatalities among human beings or animals. It does not kill trees, nor does it contaminate running water. Its only effect is to cause leaves to fall from their branches.

The United States of America consumes 13,300 tons of this product annually. From 1948 to 1960 Malaysia successfully used it in its so-called defoliation campaign in jungle areas for the purpose of combating communism.

As mentioned at the beginning of this letter, the first incidents are said to have taken place on 13 and 20 June. My Department can only regret that the Royal Government did not report the matter earlier and at the appropriate time. That would have enabled the Security Council Mission which visited Cambodia from 26 June to 5 July and Viet-Nam from 5 to 14 July to study the question thoroughly on the spot in order to assess what significance and importance it merits.

The attached document entitled "Clearing the undergrowth - WHAT ARE THE FACTS ABOUT DEFOLIATION IN SOUTH VIET-NAM?" stresses the harmless character of this herbicide and offers in three pages a succinct and eloquent description of its use and effectiveness in horticulture and national defence.

I should be grateful if Your Excellency would communicate this letter to the members of the Council in the same form as the Cambodian document in question.

Pending further clarification of this matter, I take this opportunity to assure Your Excellency of my highest consideration.

(Signed) Phan Huy Quat
Minister for Foreign Affairs of the
Republic of Viet Nam

