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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

I have signed today the instruments of ratification of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and the Biological Weapons Convention, to which the Senate gave its advice and consent on December 16, 1974.

With deep gratification, I announce the U.S. ratification of the Protocol, thus completing a process which began almost 50 years ago when the United States proposed at Geneva a ban on the use in war of "a sphyxiating, poisonous or other gases."

While the ratification of the Protocol has been delayed for many years, the United States has long supported the principles and objectives of the Geneva Protocol.

The Protocol was submitted to the Senate in 1926 and, again, in 1970. Following extensive Congressional hearings in 1971, during which differing views developed, the Executive Branch undertook a thorough and comprehensive review of the military, legal, and political issues relating to the Protocol. As a result, we have defined a new policy to govern any future use in war of riot control agents and chemical herbicides. While reaffirming the current U.S. understanding of the scope of the Protocol as not extending to riot control agents and chemical herbicides, I have decided that the U.S. shall renounce as a matter of national policy:

- (1) first use of herbicides in war except use, under regulations applicable to their domestic use, for control of vegetation within U.S. bases and installations or around their immediate defensive perimeters,
- (2) first use of riot control agents in war except in defensive military modes to save lives, such as, use of riot control agents in riot situations, to reduce civilian casualties, for rescue missions, and to protect rear area convoys.

This policy is detailed in the Executive Order which I will issue today. The Order also reaffirms our policy established in 1971 that any use in war of chemical herbicides and riot control agents must be approved by me in advance.

I am very pleased to have signed a second international agreement, entitled the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction. This is the first such agreement since World War II to provide for the actual elimination of an entire class of weapons. As you may recall, the U.S. had already unilaterally renounced these weapons before the Convention was negotiated. Our entire stockpile of biological and toxin agents and weapons has been destroyed, and our biological warfare facilities have been converted to peaceful uses.

(MORE)

The Convention provides that it will come into force upon the deposit of instruments of ratification by the three depositaries - the United States, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.S.R. - and at least nineteen other countries. Thirty-seven countries have already ratified the Convention. The United Kingdom has completed the parliamentary procedures for ratification and the Soviet Union has announced its intention to ratify very soon. While I have signed the U.S. instrument of ratification today, its deposit will be deferred until we have coordinated that action with the United Kingdom and the U.S.S.R.

It is my earnest hope that all nations will find it in their interest to join in this prohibition against biological weapons.

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