

quences (the howling and the whimpering). To illustrate: At its October meeting the Governing Board had before it a thunderingly anti-U.S. "Open Letter to North American Christians" from thirteen Latin Americans, eight of whom, all recognizable Protestants, were identified. Che Guevara would have applauded the letter's critique of "Yankee imperialism." The Board was asked by the Council's Division of Overseas Ministries to approve a reply. As anyone familiar with such proceedings would expect, a draft reply was on hand and duly adopted, putting the Council on record as confirming the letter as a statement of "the authentic and key issues" affecting relations not only between the U.S. and Latin America but the U.S. and "other parts" of the world as well.

By the text and tone of its response the Council endorsed the proposition that Latin American miseries are caused by U.S. Government and business. It accepted the letter's demand that U.S. churches transfer their "apostolic duty" from foreign mission fields to their own backyard. The Council may know the truth about Latin America, and it may know where God most wants missionaries. But truth of the analysis is not the issue here; the issue is that the Council's loud "Amen" rang hollow.

One might have reasonably anticipated that, after endorsing the letter, the assembled Christians would fall on their knees, beg God's forgiveness for what the U.S. is doing in the Southern Hemisphere, and then rise to vigorously plan for removing missionaries from Latin America and extricating church institutions from the evils of capitalism. None of that. While a lone delegate complained that proposed actions seemed weak compared to the vigorous letter, the Board was content in asking member denominations to communicate the epistle to constituents and urge parish study of it. Anyway, the hour was late. A presentation on U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico was running overtime.

The most ironic part of the response to the Latin Americans was the expressed hope that congregations would "meditate" upon the contents of the letter *before* and after the November U.S. Presidential election. In fact no denomination has a publication or other means to communicate or mass distribute anything on such short notice. And in fact no denomination was going to make a special effort to get out a document guaranteed to offend almost all its members. And, in further fact, one assumes everyone on the Board was fully aware of these facts.

In short, a house of prophecy with budgets to raise and bureaucrats to feed is self-contradictory. If it is again to be credible, the National Council of Churches must reexamine what it means to be disenchanted with the American nation while, at the same time, wanting to represent the nation's central religious heritage.

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EXCURSUS II

Hans Blix on **Banning Some Nonnuclear Weapons**

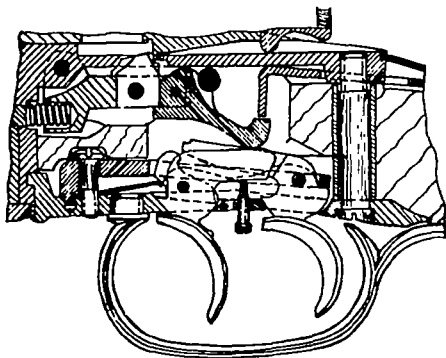
Ever since World War II the major efforts in the disarmament sphere have been devoted to nuclear weapons. These weapons undoubtedly pose the greatest threat to humanity. Less attention has been paid to the conventional weapons. Yet these are the weapons that have been used in the postwar conflicts: napalm, antipersonnel fragmentation cluster bombs, new high velocity rifles, fuel air explosives, mines used for large area seeding, etc. International public opinion has reacted against some of these weapons, especially during the Indochina conflict. At the intergovernmental level they have been discussed since 1971 in the context of the efforts to update international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts (conferences in Geneva and discussions in the U.N. General Assembly). It would seem important that nongovernmental organizations take an interest in this work and make their influence felt. Such interest would now be particularly timely, for results now depend mainly on the political will of governments. Almost all relevant facts have been compiled.

The starting point for all these discussions is that weapons should not be so designed or used as to cause any "unnecessary suffering" (to quote the language of the Hague Convention) or to give indiscriminate effects. The dum dum bullet that flattened against the human body and tore its way through was banned for this reason. No one will contend that this ban or the ban on use of bacteriological and chemical weapons (1925) achieved more than a marginal humanitarian gain. But even marginal gains of this kind must be looked for, so long as we have not succeeded in the main aim of preventing the use of armed force.

Which are the dum dum bullets of today? Years of discussion have resulted in a number of reports and proposals from which the answers might be drawn. Attention may be drawn to the Report by the U.N. Secretary General on Napalm and Other Incendiary Weapons (1972), the Report by the International Committee of the Red Cross on Weapons That May Cause Unnecessary Suffering or Have Indiscriminate Effects (1973), the Reports on the ICRC Conferences of Government Experts in Luzerne (1974) and Lugano (1976), and to the proposals and debates in the Ad Hoc Committee on Conventional Weapons of the Geneva Diplomatic Conference on International Humanitarian Law, as well as to the debates of the First Committee of the General Assembly on the item "Napalm and Other Incendiary Weapons."

There can be no doubt that napalm and other incendiary weapons is the category of weapons

against which the public reaction has been the strongest. Some official opinions, too, have been critical. In a statement issued by the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact, meeting in Bucharest July 6, 1966, the States Parties declared their condemnation of the use of napalm. Grave burn injuries are particularly painful, hard to treat medically, and likely to cause permanent physical and psychological disabilities. Moreover, many of the incendiary weapons, in particular napalm, seem by no means indispensable from the viewpoint of national defense. In the U.K. War Manual a note declares that the use of flamethrowers and napalm bombs against personnel would be contrary to the laws of war insofar as it is calculated to cause unnecessary suffering. There is ample ground for the public reaction and the official statements.



Another category of weapons that deserves to be in focus right now is that of the small-caliber automatic rifles. A new generation of projectiles—smaller than the 7.62 mm. caliber that is now used by both Warsaw and NATO pacts—is now being designed in many states. Tests indicate that some of these new bullets may have much more injurious effects than the current type. These effects seem mostly to be the result of bullet breakup or early fumbling of the bullet. It is urgently needed that all major weapons-producing states confer to avoid a new generation of bullets causing worse wounds than the old ones. This is the most common weapon used in all armed conflicts.

One area in which a measure of agreement has appeared is rules regarding the mapping of land minefields. Many people have been killed or injured by land mines that have remained after the end of hostilities. Agreement seems attainable at least that armed forces should chart all minefields over a minimum size and that such charts be made public at the end of hostilities.

The humanitarian gains that can be made through agreements on nonuse of certain particularly cruel or indiscriminate conventional weapons are perhaps marginal but by no means insignificant. So far the intergovernmental discussions at the Diplomatic Conference in Geneva have been painfully slow. One reason has probably been that public opinion has not made itself much felt. We are not concerned here with weapons of any vital importance for the strategic balance of forces in the world.

Nor should the question of control of respect for rules on *nonuse* pose a problem—as it often does for proposals on the physical elimination of weapons. If napalm were used in violation of a ban, it could easily be seen.

The Colombo Conference of Non-Aligned Countries that met in August, 1976, urged

all states to accelerate negotiations, with a view to securing, as rapidly as possible and within the context of the Diplomatic Conference to be convened in Geneva next year, the prohibition of certain conventional weapons of an indiscriminate or cruel nature, particularly the prohibition of the use of napalm and other incendiary weapons.

There can be no doubt that tangible success for the conference in this regard would mean tremendous encouragement in the broader field of disarmament. But such success will not come without good political will by governments and interest shown by public opinion.

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EXCURSUS III

Jerald Ciekot on **Making Hay While the Sun Shines**

In spite of good crops in many countries this year the world still lives hand to mouth, from one harvest to the next. As recently as 1970 the world had the equivalent of ninety days of grain consumption on reserve, including idled U.S. cropland. Now, six years later, U.S. cropland is in full use, and world stocks are down to the pipeline level of a mere thirty-day supply. This represents virtually no reserves: Moreover, by 1985 the cereals deficit of developing nations is expected to jump from its 1969-72 average of 16 million tons to 85 million tons annually.

Recognizing this grim reality, nations represented at the November, 1974, World Food Conference agreed to create an international reserve system. This was regarded as especially important for poor nations, those hardest hit by food shortages and the doubling of grain prices.

At the time of the Rome conference the only major impediment to beginning this reserve system seemed to be the size of the next harvest. That harvest turned out to be a fairly good one, and the current harvest is looking even better. But the reserve system is still nonexistent. In fact, the international discussions concerned with hammering out a workable plan are stymied.