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51st meeting

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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 51st MEETING

Chairman: Mr. XIFRA (Spain)

later: Mr. MURGESCU (Romania)

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AGENDA ITEM 70: UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT
(continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.35 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 70: UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY FOR DEVELOPMENT (continued) (A/C.2/34/L.79)

1. Mr. NANJIRA (Kenya) said that if developing countries were to succeed in ending their technological dependence by the year 2000, they would have to change their social policies, seriously plan their development and demonstrate great political will at the national and regional levels; they would, moreover, have to be in a position to satisfy the prerequisites for positive social utilization of science and technology, namely, the financing of the relevant institutions, the integration of science and technology within teaching systems and extension services, and the establishment of effective co-operation at all levels, taking due account of the specific social and cultural characteristics of each country.

2. Proceeding from those principles, his Government had been satisfied with the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development, which, in its view, had paved the way for giving practical effect to them, although it was regrettable that the final results, which were generally favourable, were disappointing with regard to some points which were critically important for developing countries. It was unfortunate, for example, that no agreement had been reached on the question of transfer of technology, which determined the development of the technological capacities of developing countries, and consequently, their economic progress and industrialization, or on the question of the code of conduct for technology transfer, owing to lack of positive political will on the part of developed countries; it was the duty of those countries not to impede the dissemination of science and technology and to show real willingness to co-operate with a view to enabling the developing countries to achieve a 25 per cent share of the world production of manufactures by the year 2000.

3. His Government had supported the proposals of the Group of 77, which were reproduced in the report of the Conference, and believed that the Intergovernmental Committee envisaged in the Programme of Action should have the status of a General Assembly committee and should deal with all questions on which no final agreement had been reached at the Vienna Conference - institutional and financial arrangements, the transfer of technology, the creation of a scientific and technological information system and the role of transnational corporations. Furthermore, the new Committee, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development, should set up a new advisory group to replace the latter body and should be empowered to establish specialized working groups, as required.

4. With regard to the other institutional arrangements referred to in the Programme of Action, he stressed the importance of the role of the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation in co-ordinating the scientific and technological activities of the United Nations. A separate high-level organizational entity should be set up which would be responsible to the Director-General and whose staff would be recruited strictly in accordance with the principles of equitable geographical distribution. In carrying out its

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(Mr. Nanjira, Kenya)

mandate, that entity would avoid any overlapping with the activities of other bodies of the United Nations system and take account of the needs of developing countries; its functions would be to assist developing countries in the institutionalization of science and technology, and to provide them with material and financial resources to facilitate their research and development work.

5. With regard to the financial arrangements adopted at Vienna, he regretted the inadequacy of the proposed financial endowment of the Interim Fund and expressed the hope that the Intergovernmental Committee could remedy that situation. He thanked the Administrator of UNDP for the "preliminary prospectus" on the functioning of the Interim Fund. The resources of the Fund could aid developing countries only if they were spent on projects that were in line with their national priorities, and the allocation of those resources by UNDP should be governed by guidelines laid down by the General Assembly and the Intergovernmental Committee, with their use being monitored by the resident co-ordinators in the field. To that end, the Intergovernmental Committee should decide at its first session on methods of project approval and personnel management, and should consider transforming the Interim Fund into a permanent fund. In view of the pressing need to make those arrangements, he urged the Secretary-General to convene the pledging conference provided for in the Vienna Programme of Action as early as possible.

6. His Government supported the draft resolution of the Group of 77. He regretted that delays in the work of the Committee had prevented Kenyan experts from participating in the debate on agenda item 70. In conclusion, he urged the General Assembly to approve the measures adopted in Vienna in view of the great importance of the role of science and technology in the establishment of the new international economic order.

7. Mr. Murescu (Romania) took the Chair.

8. Mr. DMITRIEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development had clearly demonstrated that the fundamental problems of developing countries could not be solved until international scientific and technological relations were restructured on a truly democratic basis. The Programme of Action stressed the need to create in developing countries a public sector which would plan and implement a national policy for science and technology. As had been stated at the Sixth Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Havana in September 1979, Governments should serve as a catalyst in the implementation of the scientific and technological programmes included in national development plans, and in the profound economic and social structural changes which would have to be made in order to bring well-balanced scientific and technological programmes into being. International scientific and technological co-operation should be restructured first. As his country had maintained throughout the Conference, such co-operation should be consistent with the objectives of socio-economic progress of developing countries and should be of a kind that strengthened their scientific and technological capacities. The Soviet Union, both under bilateral agreements and within the United Nations, was already

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(Mr. Dmitriev, USSR)

assisting developing countries in various ways to make better use of science and technology by providing them with seminars, courses, in-service training or programmes for the exchange of know-how.

9. The transfer of technology should take account of the interests of all developing countries and should not make them dependent on other countries. It should be borne in mind in that connexion that the activities of transnational corporations were still a serious obstacle to the scientific and technological progress of developing countries and would have to be controlled by completing the work on the international code of conduct as speedily as possible. Moreover, as the socialist and developing countries had stated in the Programme of Action, none of those questions could be tackled without first solving the problem of disarmament and thereby taking effective measures to release substantial resources which could be used to accelerate the development process world-wide. A very useful step in that direction would be to implement resolution 3093 (XXVIII), on the reduction of the military budgets of States permanent members of the Security Council by 10 per cent, adopted by the General Assembly on the initiative of the Soviet Union; his country had also recently proposed that States which possessed great economic and military potential, including those which were permanent members of the Security Council, should agree to reduce their military budget not by a percentage, but by an absolute figure, and such an agreement could cover a period of three years starting from the budget of the next financial year (A/S.10/AC.1/4). Ten per cent of the resources so released would enable assistance to developing countries to be increased substantially.

10. In order to strengthen international co-operation in science and technology, the United Nations system should draw up a single policy consistent with the provisions of the Charter. It had to be admitted that the organizational measures envisaged in the Programme of Action boiled down to establishing an Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development. Organizational issues should be dealt with strictly in accordance with the United Nations Charter and with due regard for the role of the Economic and Social Council, which had over-all responsibility for the United Nations system's economic activities, including those relating to science and technology. There was room for improvement in the efficiency of the Secretariat, and the organization of Secretariat units to co-ordinate the science and technology activities of the United Nations system should not entail any additional expenditure or increases in personnel: existing resources should be fully utilized. On the machinery for financing the science and technology activities of the United Nations the principle of voluntary funding should be scrupulously adhered to.

11. After reading the report on matters requiring consideration by the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session (A/34/587), his delegation approved of the establishment of an independent advisory body having a permanent core of distinguished experts and of an intergovernmental group of experts to devise a system of financing for science and technology for development, and was willing to participate in the latter's work. His delegation interpreted the measures outlined in paragraph 16 of the addendum to the report, on the organizational

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(Mr. Dmitriev, USSR)

implications of Secretariat support, as requiring the establishment of three separate Secretariat units: a secretariat for the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development, for which some posts would be obtained through a redeployment of resources available to the Office for Science and Technology, a second separate unit for which eight new posts would be requested, including one at the level of Under-Secretary-General or Assistant Secretary-General for the head of the unit, who would assist the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation in his role of co-ordinator, and finally, a new secretariat to manage the Interim Fund, the administrative and personnel expenditures of which would be charged to the regular budget, and for which six new posts were requested (A/34/587, para. 90). He did not consider that those measures constituted rational use of existing resources. What was needed was a single secretariat built around the nucleus of the existing Office for Science and Technology, which would be expanded, if need be, by a small number of new posts. There was absolutely no justification for the creation of the new high-level post he had referred to; paragraph 101 of the Programme of Action provided that the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation should be entrusted with the co-ordination of the contributions of the organs, organizations and bodies of the United Nations. His delegation could likewise not endorse the proposal to make available to the Administrator of UNDP resources from the regular budget of the United Nations (A/34/587, para. 90). UNDP's existing staff would run the Interim Fund, and there was no point in establishing new administrative machinery until the Fund became fully operational, in other words, until it had received sufficient voluntary contributions to finance its own expenditure. In conclusion, he said that his delegation endorsed the Conference's report, was willing to assist in the implementation of the Programme of Action's progressive provisions and trusted that outstanding issues would soon be settled.

12. Mr. FERNÁNDEZ VILLAYERDE (Spain) said that his Government had been favourably impressed by the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development. Nevertheless, he thought that it was too early to make a realistic evaluation of it, since the General Assembly had taken no decision on practical measures to follow up the Vienna Programme of Action. For the moment, what the Assembly had to do was to settle the institutional and other outstanding issues. That was all the more necessary since the Portuguese and Spanish delegations had been concerned, ever since the preparatory phase of the Conference, about the rigidity of the Programme of Action. The Programme had adopted the classification of countries currently in use within the United Nations system, which was largely based on economic indices and ignored the specific nature of the relationship between science and technology and levels of development. Some countries, such as Spain, exemplified how economic development could exist side by side with scientific and technological backwardness.

13. It was in the light of such considerations that Portugal and Spain had submitted a specific proposal at Vienna drawing attention to such differences in countries' levels of scientific and technological development. As the proposal had not been adopted by consensus within Group A, it had been agreed that it would be included in the list of unresolved problems in the report of the Conference. That

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(Mr. Fernández Villaverde, Spain)

had not been done, and his delegation trusted that it soon would be. Nevertheless, the proposal by Portugal and Spain should not be viewed as an attack on the United Nations classification of countries, which was entirely suitable for the dialogue on establishing the new international economic order.

14. Mr. GADEL HAK (Egypt) said that the Vienna Conference had reached a number of important conclusions. He regretted, however, that many problems of fundamental importance referred to in the Group of 77's draft resolution had run into opposition from some developed countries. Those countries had expressed reservations on part III of the report, and on the administrative and financial arrangements in particular, and their reservations were indicative of their negative attitude, inasmuch as the texts in question were clear and were not open to differing interpretations. He trusted that the developed countries would show more understanding in future, and urged the General Assembly to implement as soon as possible the recommendations contained in the Vienna Programme of Action by granting the new organs the resources to comply with their mandate, while taking care not to make the existing arrangements of the Interim Fund a permanent feature.

15. Miss BARRINGTON (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Economic Community, said that the Vienna Conference and the Programme of Action had led to a much greater appreciation of the importance and complexity of the relationship between the science and technology capability which any society might have at its disposal and the over-all level of its economic and social development. The examination in depth, before and during the Conference, of such crucial factors as the strengthening of the indigenous capacity of the developing countries in the field of science and technology, the transfer, acquisition and assessment of technology, the development of the human resources of developing countries and the establishment of an information network involving both developed and developing countries had resulted in a wide-ranging agreement on the comprehensive and action-oriented programme which now required implementation. From the point of view of the United Nations, the real importance of that programme lay not just in the agreement reached at Vienna, but in the conclusions concerning the institutional and financial arrangements for dealing with questions of science and technology within the United Nations framework. The Vienna Programme, for example, provided for the setting up of an Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development, whose essential role would be to define the main priorities and orientations in its field of competence, while leaving to the Governing Council of UNDP the administration of the Interim Fund. The countries of the European Community believed that UNDP's expertise made it most appropriate for it to administer the Fund, and they found the financial prospectus prepared by UNDP in consultation with the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation generally satisfactory.

16. In so far as the organization of the secretariat services was concerned, the conclusions of the Vienna Conference tallied with the views of the European Economic Community, which had consistently underlined the co-ordinating role of the Director-General as set out in General Assembly resolutions 32/197 and 33/202

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(Miss Barrington, Ireland)

on the restructuring of the economic and social sectors of the United Nations system. In that connexion, measures would have to be considered and adopted for strengthening the responsibilities of the Department of International Economic and Social Affairs to permit it to assist the Director-General in his co-ordinating role. The European Community had therefore had reservations about certain parts of the report of the Secretary-General, issued as document A/34/587 and Add.1, such as the proposal to create a new and distinct secretariat for the Intergovernmental Committee, which had not been envisaged in the Vienna Declaration; indeed, the countries of the Community doubted whether that proposal did not go against the terms of the restructuring resolutions.

17. In the view of the States members of the Community, the Vienna agreement represented a significant step forward in the global North-South dialogue; however, they were disappointed that agreement had not been reached on all the points under discussion owing to the difficulty of the subjects, lack of time or differences of approach. The outstanding issues would have to be considered further by the General Assembly, the Intergovernmental Committee or other bodies of the United Nations system. Another source of disappointment to the States members of the Community was that there had not been time to consider some of their proposals, which were referred to in paragraph 128 of the report on the Conference. They looked forward to their receiving early consideration in the Intergovernmental Committee, and they hoped that the same spirit of co-operation and constructive compromise which had been shown in Vienna would again be a feature of the current and future work on the implementation of the Programme of Action.

18. Mr. NISALF (Iraq) said that his Government refused to consider the question of science and technology for development in the traditional context of the relations of economic dependence that existed between countries; rather than taking the industrial monopolies' point of view, it believed that the question was an integral part of the new international economic order sought by the third world countries. Scientific and technological co-operation was therefore a crucial issue and could not be the subject of bargaining of any kind. Assistance to enable the developing countries to increase their productive capacity and develop their expertise must be seen as contributing to the well-being of mankind and the prosperity of the international community. Iraq's conception of scientific and technological co-operation had three basic premises. First, the developing countries had a duty to prepare themselves to assimilate new technology by creating scientific institutions, a scientific climate and a scientific attitude conducive to the best possible utilization of new technologies. The technologies must also be adapted to the national objectives and political and economic situation of each country; what mattered was not so much the volume or amount of the aid furnished as the extent to which the technologies offered could be adapted to national conditions so as to be a real factor in accelerating the economic and social progress of each country by strengthening its development process. Lastly, because of the importance of industrialization, which provided the greatest scope for applying modern technology and was the prime concern in the development strategies of third-world countries, that particular problem had to be approached boldly and dynamically rather than on the basis of sterile academic concepts.

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(Mr. Nisaif, Iraq)

19. Given its conception of science and technology for development, his delegation did not think that the Vienna Conference had managed to meet the aspirations of the third world countries, who had expected it to produce practical measures for applying scientific and technological advances to the development process and for finding solutions to the problems that concerned them. It was true that the Conference had achieved some results with regard to institutional and financial matters, but even there more co-operation on the part of the industrialized countries could reasonably have been expected, particularly where long-term financing and pledges to the Interim Fund were concerned. The developing countries were primarily interested in obtaining technology adapted to their local needs, on satisfactory terms, at satisfactory prices and on a just and acceptable basis. That was why Iraq attached overriding importance to the success of the negotiations on a code of conduct on the transfer of technology; in its view, that future legal instrument would be binding on the international community as a whole. Any other interpretation could only reinforce the status quo and lead to neglect of an important aspect of the new international economic order. Iraq was also sensitive to the "brain-drain" problem, and there were provisions in its legislation to encourage Iraqi and Arab specialists to return to their own countries. In that regard, Iraq would like to co-operate with the other countries of the Arab world in establishing an Arab centre on reverse transfer of technology. He called on the representatives of the industrialized countries to show the flexibility that was needed in order to settle the outstanding issues in the field of science and technology for development.

20. Mr. BALASUBRAMANIAM (Sri Lanka) said that he looked upon the Vienna Conference as a major landmark in the process of redressing the existing imbalance between the scientific and technological capacities of the developing and the developed nations. He recalled that science and technology were not only the key to development, but had also been the key to Western domination of the world in the colonial era. His delegation was pleased to note that the Vienna Conference had recommended the establishment of a financing system which would fund the implementation of the measures outlined in the Programme of Action, and it urged all countries to do everything possible to achieve the minimum target of \$250 million for the Interim Fund.

21. Sri Lanka wished to draw attention to a serious problem facing many developing countries, namely, the brain drain or the reverse transfer of technology. His delegation noted with satisfaction that the Programme of Action called for measures to curb the brain drain and to encourage the retention of scientific and technological talent within the developing countries. It suggested that the Intergovernmental Committee should keep that problem under review and take steps to compensate the developing countries for the loss they suffered as a result of the emigration of their skilled manpower. All efforts to train a cadre of scientists and technologists in developing countries would end in failure unless action was taken to prevent the flow of that talent to the developed countries. By way of example, he might inform the Committee that in six years Sri Lanka had lost to a single developed country 1,000 skilled professionals, whose training had represented an investment of approximately \$100 million. His delegation welcomed the proposals in the Programme of Action

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(Mr. Balasubramaniam, Sri Lanka)

regarding the establishment of scientific and technological information systems at the subregional, regional and international levels; that would go a long way towards giving the developing countries easy access to adequate scientific and technological information and remedying the narrow and fragmentary character and high cost of the present information exchange system. Lastly, his delegation was in broad agreement with the proposals of the Secretary-General regarding the organizational implications of secretariat support; in its view, any future secretariat should be headed by an Under-Secretary-General if it was to have the necessary authority to execute the heavy responsibilities entrusted to it in the Programme of Action.

22. Mr. LEIKVANG (Norway), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that a more equitable redistribution of scientific and technical resources was extremely difficult, because the mastery of science and technology was an immense source of power and was combined with economic and legal rights and obligations which were strongly ingrained in the existing structure of international relations. It was no wonder that the Vienna Programme of Action recommended a reappraisal of the procedures for the implementation of decisions of international conferences on science and technology; usually, as in the case of the 1963 Conference on the Application of Science and Technology for the Benefit of the Less Developed Areas, little attention was paid to such decisions. The Nordic countries therefore wished to stress that the agreement reached at Vienna should be respected, confirmed and translated into action; otherwise, the prestige of the United Nations would suffer.

23. With regard to the proposals on which no agreement had been reached in Vienna, mostly concerning the Code of Conduct on the Transfer of Technology, the Nordic countries considered that the paragraphs in question should be dealt with by the existing competent negotiating bodies, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication. However, the report of the Conference showed that the amount of disagreement varied from case to case and that agreement had almost been reached on certain issues. It should therefore be possible, now that Governments had had time to reflect on the outcome of the Vienna negotiations, to agree on the texts proposed by the Chairman of the First Committee on some of the unsettled issues, which were to be found in annex II to the Vienna Programme of Action. On the other hand, there would be no point in placing on the Intergovernmental Committee the burden of starting its work with the much more controversial issues concerning which expectations had been very low at the outset. The Intergovernmental Committee should be allowed to start its important work by concentrating on the crucial issues connected with the over-all policy for science and technology within the United Nations system and the elaboration of long-term arrangements and general guidelines for the financing system.

24. The Conference had none the less succeeded in formulating several concrete proposals, addressed to both the developing and the developed countries, for strengthening the scientific and technological capacity of developing countries. The recommendations addressed to the General Assembly in section III of the Programme of Action concerning, inter alia, the establishment of an Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development, an

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(Mr. Leikvang, Norway)

intergovernmental group of experts on questions of financing and an interim fund to be administered by UNDP during the biennium 1980-1981 and the development of a global referral system on scientific and technological information might, if they were really implemented and adhered to, mark a turning-point in the United Nations system's work for a more equitable distribution of scientific and technological resources among nations. It would, however, be necessary to strengthen the Secretariat, bearing in mind General Assembly resolution 32/197, in order for the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation to perform his role in that field.

25. The Nordic countries felt that the operation of the Interim Fund should faithfully reflect the agreements reached in Vienna and that its resources should be used to build up the endogenous scientific and technological capacity of developing countries. Priority should be given to meeting the scientific and technological needs of the least developed countries, and the needs of those countries should weigh more heavily than purely geographical considerations. Lastly, the delegations of the Nordic countries attached great importance to the follow-up of all parts of the Programme of Action; they would emphasize the responsibilities in that regard of the agencies and organizations of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions.

26. Mr. JAMTOMO (Indonesia) said that the United Nations Conference on Science and Technology for Development had played a very important role because it had brought about a useful exchange of views and had resulted in the adoption of a Programme of Action, the major themes of which were the strengthening of the scientific and technological capacities of developing countries and restructuring of the existing pattern of international scientific and technological relations. In view of its content, the Programme of Action should be fully endorsed by the General Assembly. However, much remained to be done, and it was regrettable to note that some proposals put forward by the developing countries were not reflected in the Programme of Action. In view of the serious imbalances in international technological and scientific relations, which were prejudicial to the interests of the developing countries, the international community must take action to restructure those relations so as to encourage a build-up of scientific and technological capabilities in developing countries, improve scientific and technological information networks and give developing countries readier access to all the technologies they needed and to the results of research and development activities undertaken in developed countries. Unfortunately, the question of the transfer of technology and the large role played by the transnational corporations in that matter, which had undoubtedly been one of the most important issues dealt with by the Conference, remained unsettled.

27. It was to be hoped that the Intergovernmental Committee on Science and Technology for Development would be able to settle the outstanding issues. The Committee, the establishment of which his delegation supported, would have to ensure the implementation of the Programme of Action and the participation of all countries on an equal basis. Some institutional and financial questions remained. The Programme of Action was quite clear with regard to secretariat support (see para. 103), although there might be diverse interpretations. In the view of

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(Mr. Jantomo, Indonesia)

his delegation, it was essential to have a separate secretariat unit capable of co-ordinating a whole range of scientific and technological activities. It should be headed by a high-level official and be directly responsible to the Director-General for Development and International Economic Co-operation. The financial arrangements made so far seemed satisfactory to his delegation, which hoped that the Interim Fund would be set up without delay and that the Pledging Conference could take place before the end of 1979. His delegation also considered it desirable to establish an intergovernmental group of experts to study a financing system for science and technology for development, provided that its composition reflected the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.