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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 11th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 13 October 2023, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Joyini . . . . . (South Africa)

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23-19333 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 47: Effects of atomic radiation
(A/78/46 and A/C.4/78/L.7)

1. **Ms. Chen** (Canada), Chair of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, introducing the report of the Scientific Committee on its seventieth session (A/78/46) and accompanying her statement with a digital slide presentation, said that the Scientific Committee had a purely scientific mandate; it did not advise on protection or policies, although States and international organizations drew on its evaluations when developing protection frameworks, legal instruments, policies and programmes concerning the use of technologies employing ionizing radiation.

2. The seventieth session of the Scientific Committee had been attended by more than 150 scientists from 30 members States and 11 observer international organizations. The Scientific Committee had revised its governing principles, adopted a procedure on its scientific annexes and reports for publication and discussed six potential topics for the period 2025–2029, three of which had been selected for further evaluation. The Scientific Committee's current programme of work included five projects, developed through expert groups, with two ad-hoc working groups addressing specific cross-cutting tasks. The goal of the project regarding second primary cancer after radiotherapy was to raise awareness among scientists, medical communities and national authorities of the potential for second primary cancers developing several years after cancer treatment by radiation. The project regarding evaluation of public exposure to ionizing radiation, initiated in 2020, included a survey of public exposure, launched in 2021, for which 105 Member States had nominated national contact persons for data collection and for which 59 Member States had submitted data by the end of August 2023. States that had not yet nominated national contact persons were invited to do so and to participate actively in similar future surveys of the Scientific Committee. The expert group devoted to epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer had made significant progress in the drafting of the scientific annex on all the 25 selected cancer sites and in summarizing the corresponding literature review. The expert group devoted to evaluation of diseases of the circulatory system from radiation exposure had discussed the initial results of a literature review and the Scientific Committee had endorsed the proposed structure of the related evaluation and updated timeline. The project regarding nervous-system effects of ionizing radiation had been started in April 2023 and was expected to be approved in 2027. The Scientific Committee had endorsed the related timeline and the structure of the evaluation. The mandates of the ad hoc working group on effects and mechanisms and the ad hoc working group on sources and exposure had been extended and their valuable work had been acknowledged by the Scientific Committee.

3. At its seventieth session, the Scientific Committee had provided feedback on ongoing and planned outreach activities. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) booklet *Radiation: Effects and Sources* was available in 15 languages, and the Scientific Committee's report on radiation exposure owing to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station had been disseminated at an outreach event in Japan. The Scientific Committee's programme of work continued to contribute to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 3, on good health and wellbeing; Goal 14, on healthy oceans and sea; Goal 15, on conserving life on land; and Goal 17, on revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development.

Draft resolution A/C.4/78/L.7: Effects of atomic radiation

4. **Mr. Hirji** (Canada), introducing the draft resolution, said that the apolitical technical analyses of the Scientific Committee were a global public good that should be shared more widely. The text reflected the continued shared commitment of delegates to the Scientific Committee and its work.

5. **Mr. Hansen** (Representative of the European Union, in its capacity as observer), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia and Ukraine, and, in addition, Monaco, said that the work of the Scientific Committee had contributed to a better international understanding of the biological mechanisms underlying the effects on human health and non-human biota of ionizing radiation. The European Union welcomed the Scientific Committee's work on medical exposure to atomic radiation, which was in line with the Strategic Agenda for Medical Ionising Radiation Applications (SAMIRA) Action Plan adopted by the European Commission in 2021.

6. The European Union commended the availability of the Scientific Committee's assessments, which helped to better prepare international emergency response and recovery efforts and to improve the management of legacy sites, and the Scientific Committee's valuable work to evaluate public exposure to ionizing radiation. The research projects of the European Union, led by the European Partnership for Radiation Protection Research (PIANOFORTE), would contribute key information to international efforts.

7. **Mr. Khan** (Pakistan) said that Pakistan had regulations to protect against ionizing radiation and regularly monitored the exposure of workers in nuclear facilities and health-care patients to radiation. Pakistan would continue to contribute towards an online exposure data-collection platform and to participate in the Scientific Committee's global exposure surveys.

8. To reinforce acceptance of nuclear technology, global efforts were needed to highlight the benefits of atomic radiation. Pakistan encouraged the Scientific Committee to improve its availability of information in all official languages of the United Nations. While noting the new language versions of the UNEP booklet *Radiation: Effects and Sources*, Pakistan proposed translation also into Urdu.

9. **Mr. Pieris** (Sri Lanka) said that his country's protection framework focused on the use of radiation sources and work was aimed at expanding capabilities to accommodate future nuclear power programmes, including a network of monitoring stations. Supplementary monitoring support was being developed for power station operators and users of medical applications.

10. In line with its commitment to international peace and security, Sri Lanka had established a gamma scanning centre to improve the precision and efficiency of its inspections and had conducted a study addressing food safety that traced the origin of the milk supply using stable isotope data that had broader implications for economic stability and, consequently, social well-being.

11. Sri Lanka recognized the challenges it faced in providing optimal cancer care and had carried out a study of thyroid cancer treatment that had shed light on radiation exposure risks. His country welcomed the emphasis of the resolution on accelerating the evaluation of second primary cancers following radiotherapy.

12. **Mr. Molla** (Bangladesh) said that while it was committed to protecting its people and environment from the harmful effects of ionizing radiation, Bangladesh had taken initiatives to make peaceful use of nuclear energy. Under its multifaceted International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) country programme framework for 2018–2023, projects had been conducted to improve food security, through the development of stress-tolerant crop varieties. The Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture had developed high-yield rice varieties and rice output had been increased threefold since the 1970s.

13. In preparation for the operation of the country's first nuclear power station, Bangladesh had adopted policy on waste and spent-fuel management and IAEA had completed an integrated regulatory review service mission to his country.

14. Bangladesh commended the Scientific Committee's public information and outreach strategy and encouraged translation of the UNEP booklet *Radiation: Effects and Sources* into more languages.

15. **Ms. Rolle Hernández** (Cuba) said that Cuba welcomed the work done on the projects on the Scientific Committee's programme of work and believed it was necessary, in addition, to strengthen the strategy to collect, analyse and disseminate information on exposure to radiation. The advanced scientific quality of the Scientific Committee's reports made them reference documents for national and international standards to protect populations from the harmful effects of ionizing radiation. Seventy-eight years after the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and despite the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, nuclear-weapon States had not given up their nuclear arsenals. Cuba believed that only the total elimination of such weapons could guarantee that humanity would never again suffer their terrible impact.

16. Collaboration should be maintained and strengthened among the Scientific Committee and other bodies of the United Nations system, including the World Health Organization (WHO), IAEA and UNEP. Joint efforts had contributed to the implementation of the Scientific Committee's strategic guidelines and generated benefits for humanity, especially in health care and environmental protection. Serious and wide-ranging cooperation was the only path to eliminating the potential dangers posed by ionizing radiation.

17. **Mr. Sahraei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his country attached great importance to the work of the Scientific Committee, which had always made valuable contributions to expand knowledge and understanding of the levels, effects and risks of exposure to ionizing radiation, fulfilling its mandate with scientific authority and independence of judgment.

18. Aware that the Scientific Committee needed experts of the highest quality, priority should also be given to adequate, assured and predictable funding and to geographically balanced staffing of its secretariat. The appropriate administrative measures must be taken to maintain independence and to continue to perform its functions.

19. **Mr. Al-Saed** (Iraq) said that because of the devastating and long-term effects on people and the

environment of atomic radiation, the international community must put aside short-term interests and put an end to all but the peaceful uses of ionizing radiation, such as in health care and energy production.

20. Although the Scientific Committee had made valuable contributions to raising awareness and knowledge of exposure to radiation, its effects and risks, it must ensure it included the latest developments and results in its reports. Iraq commended the Scientific Committee on its strategy to improve data collection and encouraged IAEA, WHO, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and other bodies to cooperate further to gather, identify and disseminate information on the exposure to radiation of patients, workers and the general public.

21. The experiences of conflicts suffered by Iraq in recent decades made the issue of radiation especially important. Children all over the world struggled with access to nutrition, education and technology, but children in Iraq faced the added problem that many had cancers and had been born with disabilities and birth defects. Even children without disabilities were at risk, because of environmental pollution.

22. Iraq supported any effort to reduce the risks of ionizing radiation in the light of the enormous environmental threat it posed to humankind. Atomic radiation must never be used in times of war because of its long-term destructive effects.

23. **Mr. Alvarez** (Argentina) said that as a founding member of the Scientific Committee, Argentina had always supported its work by providing experts to work without charge and had made other contributions in kind. Argentina had asked the Scientific Committee to study second primary cancers after radiotherapy and Argentine experts were helping the secretariat in that activity. In conjunction with IAEA, the Nuclear Regulatory Authority of Argentina had proposed the monitoring of accidental exposures and hoped that the related study could be completed promptly. Argentina believed that the other projects on the programme of work of the Scientific Committee were very important and supported those efforts.

24. He encouraged the Scientific Committee to focus its public information and dissemination strategy on updating the UNEP booklet *Radiation: Effects and Sources*, on whose Spanish version Argentina had collaborated. Argentina offered to contribute to producing the updated document.

25. **Ms. Mitsui** (Japan) said that Japan commended the work by the Scientific Committee to broaden knowledge and deepen understanding of the levels, effects and risks of exposure to ionizing radiation based on independent and evidence-based scientific research. Her country particularly appreciated the active and continued outreach work of the Scientific Committee in Japan and internationally in relation to its findings on the levels and effects of radiation exposure owing to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station.

26. **Mr. Ondo** (Cameroon) said that the Scientific Committee made an invaluable contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the harmful effects of exposure to ionizing radiation, as had been illustrated by its reports and scientific publications. Cameroon had always followed its assessments, which constituted the scientific basis for international standards, with interest. The harmful effects, of all types, of radiation on human health and the environment had been countered through numerous initiatives, including measures taken by the General Assembly, and the scientific bases established by radiation protection bodies to address risks through recommended practices and international standards and regulations.

27. Cameroon had had a National Radiation Protection Agency since 2002 and its 1995 Act on radiation protection addressed current concerns related to nuclear terrorism and the insecurity facing Central Africa and Cameroon in particular. His country had also taken measures to regulate radiation sources and their import and export, radioactive waste management and the monitoring of doses received by workers, and had brought laws and regulations into line with international standards.

28. Cameroon maintained excellent cooperation with IAEA, whose programmes had a visible impact in his country in such areas as health, nutrition, food, agriculture, water, the environment, industrial applications, nuclear power planning and production, radiation protection and nuclear safety. IAEA had asked Cameroon to host regional events, including a regional training course on the management of spent sources, a subregional desk exercise on radioactive material transport security and a coordination meeting on strengthening the implementation of basic safety standards and radioactive waste management.

29. **Monsignor Caccia** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Holy See welcomed the Scientific Committee's focus on various health-related topics and took particular interest in its study of public exposure to ionizing radiation. His delegation hoped that the study would devote ample attention to exposure in areas contaminated by nuclear use and the testing of nuclear

explosives, which disproportionately affects women, children and the unborn.

30. New threats, including the war in the vicinity of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power station, ran the risk of triggering an uncontrolled release of ionizing radiation. The Scientific Committee's experience gained in assessing the levels and the effects of radiation exposure owing to the nuclear accident at the Fukushima-Daiichi nuclear power station could prove vital to an adequate response to any future incident.

31. **Ms. Ling** Feng (China) said that China had always maintained international exchanges to cooperate in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and nuclear safety and had shared its regulatory approach and practical experience.

32. Subsequent to the Fukushima nuclear accident, which was one of the worst to have ever occurred, the disposal of nuclear-contaminated water was a matter concerning global public health, marine ecology and sustainable economic development. The discharge of contaminated water was unprecedented and irresponsible. A long-term international monitoring arrangement should be established, with the meaningful participation of the countries that neighboured Japan and other stakeholders.

33. **Ms. Ukabiala** (Secretary of the Committee) said that the following delegations had become sponsors of the draft resolution: Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Czechia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malta, Monaco, Portugal, Russian Federation, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Thailand and United States of America.

34. *Draft resolution A/C.4/78/L.7 was adopted.*

35. **Mr. Alvarez** (Argentina) said that the Scientific Committee was facing new and complex challenges that must be addressed promptly. Discussions had proliferated among the scientific community on the effects of low-dose radiation. In its 2012 report (A/67/46, Chap. III), the Scientific Committee had concluded that increases in the incidence of health effects in populations could not be attributed reliably to chronic exposure to radiation at levels that were typical of the global average background levels of radiation. In its statement of the previous year, his delegation had asked the secretariat to ensure that epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer were conducted in strict accordance with the conclusions of the 2012 report. It was crucial to make a clear distinction between studies of cohorts exposed to high doses of radiation that as a result had suffered a radiological epidemic (for example, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and cohorts exposed to low doses and low-dose-rate radiation, for whom it was not possible to unequivocally state that radiation had caused harm.

36. After the Scientific Committee's seventieth session, its estimates of radiation risks had been called into question owing to the publication of the International Nuclear Workers Study, coordinated by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, an agency of WHO. Consequently, his delegation believed that the Scientific Committee must address the matter as soon as possible.

37. **Ms. Mitsui** (Japan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the representative of China had incorrectly referred to contaminated water because the water being discharged had concentrations of radioactive materials that were far below regulatory standards, achieved through the use of Advanced Liquid Processing System (ALPS). The Government of Japan had always provided detailed explanations regarding the discharge of ALPS-treated water into the sea and had worked with IAEA and in line with international standards. After dilution, the levels of tritium, which was found in water discharged from nuclear facilities around the world, would be one seventh of the WHO permitted level for drinking water. IAEA had visited Japan and conducted a series of safety reviews on ALPS-treated water. Monitoring since discharge had begun on 24 August 2023 had found no anomalies.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.