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SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE
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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 4th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. EL-CHOUFI (Syrian Arab Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 47: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (A/34/322; A/SPC/34/L.2)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, in addition to the report of the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/34/322), the Committee had before it a draft resolution (A/SPC/34/L.2) sponsored by the Federal Republic of Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand and the United States.

2. Mr. TRANTWEIN (Federal Republic of Germany) said that it was of great importance to take effective protective measures against the harmful effects of atomic radiation, especially in view of the fact that the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes had now become an integral part of modern technology. Over the past 24 years, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had produced several important studies and reports in that field. At its twenty-eighth session, held in 1979, the Scientific Committee had reviewed General Assembly resolution 33/5 and a number of documents prepared by the Secretariat. The Committee had confined its discussion to matters of substance and principle and had made suggestions for putting the finishing touches on the first draft of documents, which would be completed by the Secretariat.

3. The Committee had continued the preparation of documents on the criteria applicable to selected radio-nuclides for the United Nations Environment Programme and had requested all Member States to submit reports and studies and to promote research projects on that point. The Committee had reiterated its plea for additional relevant information, which would greatly assist it in preparing the major report which it was to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session.

4. In introducing draft resolution A/SPC/34/L.2, he wished to announce that Austria, Belgium, France and the United Kingdom had become co-sponsors. He hoped that many delegations would follow suit and that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

5. Mr. SIDDIQUI (Bangladesh) expressed appreciation for the informative report prepared by the Scientific Committee, which was yet another example of the painstaking efforts which had characterized the Committee's work since its inception. He noted that the Committee had studied, inter alia, sources of radiation and the corresponding human exposures, models for assessing radiation doses and the extremely important question of the genetic effects of radiation and synergism between radiation and other environmental agents. He agreed with the Committee that there should be an in-depth study of all aspects of atomic radiation, in particular the effects of accelerated neutrons in medicine. He endorsed the continuation of the Committee's mandate, including its important co-ordination activities, with a view to increasing knowledge of the levels and effects of atomic radiation from all sources. The Committee should, however, try to prepare summaries of its reports in sufficiently simple language to make them accessible to the layman and they should be given adequate publicity. The Department of Public Information could play a vital role in that respect.

(Mr. Siddiqui, Bangladesh)

6. The Special Political Committee, for its part, should refrain from being just a rubber-stamp for the Committee's work. It should not just pay tribute to that work, but should try to make a realistic appraisal of the problems of radiation.

7. The developing countries were faced with a cruel dilemma: on the one hand, it was vital for all mankind to take decisive action to prohibit the development and manufacture of new generations of increasingly sophisticated and powerful nuclear weapons on the other hand, international co-operation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy and in dealing with the problems of environmental protection and human health must be developed. Consideration should also be given to the possible use of alternative sources of energy through nuclear fission.

8. Thirty-four years after Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the main potential source of atomic radiation continued to be the use of nuclear energy for military purposes. An effective solution must therefore be found to the problem of nuclear disarmament. His country believed that nuclear energy should be used exclusively for peaceful purposes and development. It was opposed to the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and had recently decided to become a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. The international community had a political and moral responsibility not only to prevent atomic radiation but also to eliminate the danger of contamination resulting from deliberate nuclear explosions. The enormous destructive capacity of existing nuclear arsenals and the contamination caused by nuclear tests jeopardized man's right to live in a natural environment free of all contamination and went so far as to threaten his survival.

9. The development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes also had its dangers, as the recent Three Mile Island incident had shown, and far more needed to be known regarding adequate prevention and safeguards before the tremendous potential of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes could be fully harnessed without fear and anxiety. The dangers were even more manifest for the developing countries, which lacked the basic technical know-how and had to rely on imported technology. The developing countries should be able to benefit from the wide range of applications of nuclear energy for their economic development, and the Scientific Committee could be most useful in that regard by providing the information base necessary to assess the potential risks and advantages of nuclear technology.

10. In conclusion, he appealed to all States and agencies to assist the Scientific Committee, and expressed particular gratification at the increasing co-operation between the Committee and the United Nations Environment Programme.

11. Mr. FRANCIS (New Zealand) said that the report submitted by the Scientific Committee to the current session of the General Assembly was particularly significant in that it indicated the direction of the research in progress. The questions which the Committee had studied reflected not only the threat posed by nuclear weapons, but also the risks inherent in the peaceful uses of atomic energy, which demanded the same vigilance, safeguards and high scientific standards.

(Mr. Francis, New Zealand)

12. His Government wished to emphasize its views on the unnecessary uses of atomic energy, namely the production of ionizing radiation by the unnecessary testing of nuclear weapons. His Government believed strongly that all testing of nuclear weapons was unnecessary and it was totally opposed to all forms of nuclear testing, in the atmosphere or underground, wherever it took place.

13. The underground nuclear tests carried out in the South Pacific continued to be a matter of concern to the people of the region. Two incidents which had occurred in 1979 on the island of Mururoa, in French Polynesia, had alerted the people to the risks and dangers of nuclear tests. On 6 July, an explosion in a laboratory had caused the deaths of two people and injury to others. On 25 July, two hours after a particularly large underground nuclear explosion, a large wave had swept over the coast of the atoll and injured a number of people, two of them seriously. On 17 August, the Territorial Assembly of French Polynesia had adopted a resolution requesting the French Government to suspend tests so as to permit a local committee to receive depositions and investigate the circumstances of the accidents. The resolution also asked that a team of civilian, impartial French and foreign radiologists should visit French Polynesia to carry out technical and medical investigations. In response to that request, a team of French scientists had been sent to French Polynesia: he hoped that the French delegation would be able to tell the Committee the results of the investigations and would provide assurances that the explosions had not affected the geological structures of the atoll or its surroundings in such a way as to involve the release or risk of release of radioactivity into the ocean or the atmosphere. It would be particularly interesting to have details of the monitoring programmes carried out by the French authorities, especially in regard to marine life. The absence of assurances on that point and the lack of scrutiny by outside experts was of particular concern to the New Zealand public.

14. His delegation was a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/34/L.2 and was sure that the Scientific Committee would be particularly interested in the information that might be provided by the French delegation in accordance with the request made in the draft resolution for Member States to supply information on exposures from various sources of radiation.

15. He reaffirmed New Zealand's active support for the work of the Scientific Committee and said that only ceaseless vigilance would protect the fragile environment of the world from the dangers which underlay even the most peaceful uses of atomic energy.

16. Mr. FUJITA (Japan) said that Japan, as one of the member countries of the Scientific Committee, had attached great importance to its activities since its establishment in 1955. Japan was concerned about the potentially harmful effects of atomic radiation on mankind and on the natural environment and believed that they should be thoroughly investigated and assessed. His Government highly appreciated the Committee's steady pursuit of its activities on a purely scientific basis. It also noted with satisfaction the development of co-operation between the Committee and the United Nations Environment Programme. His delegation fully supported the continuation of the Committee's work and welcomed the fact that the Committee had

(Mr. Fujita, Japan)

already decided to convene its twenty-ninth session in September 1980. Japan was one of the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/34/L.2 and hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

18. Mr. ZENKVITZUS (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the work done by the Scientific Committee, which was responsible for preparing the report to be submitted to the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly in 1981, was constructive. His delegation was pleased that the Scientific Committee had made a thorough study of the harmful effects of ionizing radiation on man and on the environment, population exposure from natural and artificial radiation sources, and radioactive contamination of the environment caused by nuclear explosions and nuclear power production. Useful work had been performed in assessing harmful doses of radiation, particularly in respect of models for the assessment of low doses of radiation. The recommendations made by the Scientific Committee after analysing a large amount of data would be very useful and would no doubt have practical applications for the protection of man and the environment in various countries.

19. The USSR could not fail to mention a very topical problem which must be solved as a matter of urgency, namely the effects of ionizing radiation released by nuclear explosions. Unfortunately, nuclear tests were continuing, and that was causing legitimate concern among the peoples of the world since those tests were harmful to human health and to the earth's flora and fauna. As was well known, the USSR was sparing no effort to halt nuclear weapons tests, restrain the nuclear arms race and prevent the outbreak of a nuclear war. It was on the initiative of the USSR that those urgent questions were considered at every session of the General Assembly. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Gromyko, had noted in his address to the thirty-fourth session of the General Assembly that the manufacture of nuclear weapons of all kinds must be stopped and nuclear arsenals must be progressively reduced until they were completely eliminated. It was in the interests of mankind to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

20. The time had come to conclude a treaty for the general and complete prohibition of nuclear weapons tests which would be strictly observed by all countries, and first and foremost by all the nuclear Powers. Implementation of the Soviet proposal would offer a lasting solution to the problem of protecting mankind and the environment from radiation released by nuclear weapons tests. The Soviet Union was satisfied with the work done by the Scientific Committee and hoped that it would continue its labours. It also welcomed the broadening of the Committee's co-operation with the United Nations Environment Programme.

21. Mr. AHMED (India) said that the problem of the effects of ionizing radiation had been on the Committee's agenda since the establishment of the Scientific Committee in 1955, and seven substantive reports had been submitted. Mankind was not yet able to protect itself from the harmful effects of ionizing radiation. Yet an increasing number of countries would depend more and more on nuclear energy, so that by the end of the century there would be very few countries which did not have a nuclear power station. Ionizing radiation was released in the atmosphere from a number of sources, and beyond a certain point it was known to be harmful both to man and to his surroundings. It was therefore necessary to monitor the over-all level of radiation.

(Mr. Ahmed India)

22. His delegation was pleased that the Scientific Committee was currently studying dose assessment models, population exposure from natural radiation sources, contamination from radon and its decay products, radiation emitted by medical radiological procedures and doses received by workers exposed in the course of their work the contamination resulting from nuclear explosions; doses resulting from nuclear power production; and the effects of ionizing radiation, including the genetic effects. It noted that the Secretariat was preparing a document on the interaction of ionizing radiation with other agents encountered in the environment and that the Scientific Committee was to submit its comprehensive report to the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly. However, it hoped that the annual reports of the Scientific Committee would be a little more detailed.

23. The CHAIRMAN announced that Samoa had become a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/34/L.2. He suggested that the list of speakers for the general debate on item 47 should be closed at the beginning of the next meeting. He also requested members of the Committee who wished to take part in the discussions on item 50, beginning on the afternoon of 17 October, to enter their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible.

The meeting rose at 3.50 p.m.