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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 5th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. NEUGEBAUER (German Democratic Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 54: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued) (A/32/40; A/SPC/32/L.1)

1. Mr. LOVO CASTELAR (El Salvador) said that the technological advances which had made possible the use of atomic energy for constructive, peaceful purposes had brought with them major risks to human beings, including the harmful effects of radiation and the danger of a nuclear conflict.
2. The Organization's interest in that subject had resulted in the establishment in 1955 of the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. At its twenty-sixth session, the Committee had ably carried out its mandate and prepared a great many painstaking technical reports. The comprehensive 1977 report (A/32/40) represented a major contribution to the effort to determine the extent of the risks resulting from the present use of nuclear technology and to estimate levels of radiation for the year 2000.
3. In that context, he thought it deplorable and reprehensible that some States were continuing to carry out nuclear tests and thus contaminating the atmosphere, including the underground portion thereof, which also entailed a danger of radiation leaks. His delegation wished to express criticism once again of the continued production of nuclear weapons, which posed the threat of a world-wide holocaust.
4. Finally, he announced that his delegation was joining the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/32/L.1.
5. Mr. DROZDOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that artificial and natural radiation posed an increasing danger to man and to the environment and that it was essential to take timely and effective protective measures against its harmful effects. He emphasized that the question of radiation should not be considered in isolation as a purely scientific and technological problem but in the broader context of the political aspects of present-day international life.
6. The report of the Scientific Committee, which met a high professional standard and was of great practical value, was the result of a five-year search for means of systematizing and analysing the information collected on radiation levels and on the dangers which they posed to the population. The Scientific Committee had achieved positive results, and the successful completion of the task entrusted to it would help to improve the world situation, particularly in the matter of putting an end to nuclear-weapon tests. Such tests, particularly those conducted in the atmosphere, helped to raise the level of radiation in the world and constituted a growing threat to human beings as well as flora and fauna; it was therefore essential that they should be brought to an end.
7. In that connexion, his delegation had made specific proposals for halting the arms race, particularly the draft treaty on the complete and general prohibition of

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(Mr. Drozdov, USSR)

nuclear-weapon tests, which had been submitted to the General Assembly. It was essential for States Members of the United Nations to make a concerted effort to solve those problems and deliver mankind and the world from the grave danger of atomic contamination.

8. The Scientific Committee must continue its useful and important work. His delegation agreed with the Committee concerning the need to give greater attention to study of the somatic and genetic impact on man of radiation in small doses. It felt that efforts should focus on artificial radiation resulting from the production of nuclear energy, the use of radiation in medicine and nuclear-weapon tests. It also agreed on the need to continue the growing co-operation between the Scientific Committee and UNEP, which could make a major contribution to solving the problems with which both bodies were concerned.

9. Mr. BENAVIDES (Peru) said that he wished to emphasize once again the importance which his delegation attached to the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, whose principal aim was to limit the use of nuclear energy to peaceful and developmental purposes. That would call for major efforts, but the "political realism" argument employed to oppose the demands of the developing countries, according to which certain situations were too intractable to be changed, was unacceptable. On the contrary, a moral and political duty existed to do everything possible to halt the use of nuclear energy for military purposes.

10. His delegation expressed consternation at the fact that nuclear tests were continuing, and it firmly believed that the complete cessation of such tests could not be achieved unless there was a strong world-wide awareness of the need for their cessation. An important role in creating that awareness was being played by the Scientific Committee, whose work was aimed at creating a better understanding of the harmful effects of atomic radiation. In that connexion, the Scientific Committee could make a further contribution by preparing a summary of its work and conclusions, which should be widely circulated and presented in layman's language. The United Nations Office of Public Information could supplement that project by distributing the Scientific Committee's studies through its various channels.

11. He felt that it would have been useful for the Scientific Committee's report to indicate, inter alia, whether or not the various doses were below the levels regarded as dangerous and whether the "global dose commitment" was uniform throughout the world or represented a statistical average which did not take regional differences into account.

12. His delegation hoped that the Scientific Committee would submit comprehensive reports at more frequent intervals. It also suggested that the Committee should establish close relations with the International Commission on Radiological Protection so that its conclusions would be given practical effect.

13. Mr. KHMENLNITSKY (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that the discussion of the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation showed how interested States were in studying the effects of atomic radiation on man and his environment. His delegation associated itself with the expressions of appreciation for the work of the Scientific Committee.

14. Progress would not be possible without the use of atomic energy, and it was therefore essential to find optimum standards governing the effects of man's productive activities on himself and his environment; he noted that the report sought to formulate optimum standards relating to the effects of atomic radiation as well as measures for minimizing the risks to human health.

15. Heedless of world opinion, some States were trying to develop ever more monstrous weapons, such as the neutron bomb, which produced very high levels of radio-activity. The success of the Scientific Committee's work therefore depended on the ability of the international community to resolve a series of important political questions and achieve a ban on the manufacture of new types of weapons of mass destruction, a general and complete prohibition of nuclear-weapon tests and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. It was also essential to obtain guarantees that countries with the capacity to export atomic materials and technology did so only to non-nuclear-weapon States which were prepared to observe the safeguards adopted by IAEA for all programmes involving the peaceful use of atomic energy.

16. His delegation fully supported the Soviet proposal on the deepening and consolidation of international détente and prevention of the danger of nuclear war. The total prohibition of nuclear-weapon tests in all environments would be a victory for the United Nations. As was pointed out in the report of the Scientific Committee, the collective dose commitment from nuclear explosions was twice as high if the contribution from carbon-14 was included.

17. Prompted by its great concern at the harmful effects of nuclear tests on the present and future generations, his delegation felt that the work of the Scientific Committee should continue.

18. Mr. LAL (Fiji) said that his delegation had noted with growing concern the multiplying sources of radiation to which man and his environment were being subjected and that it therefore fully supported the valuable work of the Scientific Committee.

19. It was, however, ironic that some were making use of that forum to study a situation which they themselves had largely created through the continued testing and perfecting of their nuclear technologies in territories far from their own. As in past years, it was with deep regret that his delegation was once again obliged to draw the Special Political Committee's attention to the question of continued nuclear testing in the South Pacific. While some in the world had been spared the agony of nuclear testing as a result of their protests, his country could not say the same. The atmospheric testing of nuclear devices had in some instances led to underground testing. His delegation was not convinced that such tests were

any less hazardous than atmospheric explosions, and it continued to maintain that the dangers of vertical seepage of radio-active contamination from tests conducted on the continental land mass remained as grave as in the past. He also expressed concern at the hazards of horizontal and vertical seepage from continuing underground nuclear explosions, particularly in the South Pacific islands.

20. His country's continued opposition to all nuclear tests, including underground tests, stemmed mainly from the fact that such tests constituted the largest single source of radio-activity. The livelihood of the people of Fiji and of nearby developing island countries depended on the surrounding seas, and any possibility of increased radio-active contamination of the oceans was therefore a cause of great concern. He emphasized the danger that isotopes seeping into sea and inland waterways might accumulate in sources that constituted a vital part of the food chain as well as the danger of radiation resulting from the leakage of buried radio-active wastes, which was posed by the dumping of nuclear wastes in the sea. His delegation requested the Scientific Committee to undertake a study of that last question.

21. Continued attention should be given to the hazards of occupational exposure to radiation and to the question of the somatic and long-term genetic effects of radiation. In that connexion, his country's concern over increasing exposure to radiation was particularly heightened by the introduction of man-made sources of radio-active contamination in the vicinity of Fiji.

22. Mr. ROSS (New Zealand) said that his delegation wished to join others that had spoken in commending the report of the Scientific Committee. It noted with pleasure that the Scientific Committee enjoyed the co-operation and assistance of Member States and specialized agencies and had established strong links with the United Nations Environment Programme.

23. Without wishing to introduce a jarring note, his delegation endorsed the suggestion made by the representative of Australia at the preceding meeting to the effect that future reports should, in so far as possible, be drafted in a language readily understood by laymen and should include a glossary of technical terms. The inclusion of a summary of conclusions and recommendations would also be useful.

24. New Zealand was opposed to nuclear-weapons testing in all environments and had been collaborating for many years in the formulation of effective measures to prevent proliferation and control peaceful nuclear explosions. It therefore felt concerned about the possible environmental effects of underground testing at Pacific atolls; it was monitoring relevant developments in its region and was regularly submitting reports to the Scientific Committee. His delegation urged those Governments which did not furnish such reports to do so in future. In that connexion, the scientific community in New Zealand would be interested to know what scientific studies the French Government had undertaken and made available concerning the environmental effects of its underground testing at Mururoa Atoll.

25. In conclusion, his delegation wished to express its gratification at the fact that many countries had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/32/L.1, which it hoped would receive universal support.

26. Mr. EHSASSI (Iran) took note with satisfaction of the report submitted by the Scientific Committee and paid tribute to its members for their admirable study of the various effects of atomic radiation. His delegation firmly supported the work of the Scientific Committee and hoped that, through its growing links with IAEA and UNEP and other specialized agencies, it would continue doing useful work. Furthermore, his delegation was confident that the Scientific Committee would confine itself strictly to fact-finding and not permit itself to be used as a political platform.

27. Iran supported the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, but it had always opposed nuclear proliferation. For that reason, it had been one of the first countries to accept the provisions of the 1963 Treaty banning nuclear-weapons tests in the atmosphere, in outer space and under water and the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Iran noted with satisfaction that an ever-increasing number of countries were acceding to those important international instruments, thereby strengthening the non-proliferation régime and improving the prospects of peace.

28. Within the framework of its mandate, the Scientific Committee could contribute substantially to clarifying certain technical issues which might open the road for further progress. His delegation therefore reaffirmed its full support for the continued work of the Scientific Committee and recommended that a new report should be submitted to the General Assembly at its thirty-third session.

29. Mr. SCALABRE (France), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that he wished to dispel the concerns of the representative of Fiji with regard to the risk of radio-active contamination to which the peoples of the Pacific might be exposed as a result of France's nuclear tests.

30. It was regrettable that the report of the Scientific Committee did not reproduce certain comments made in the provisional reports of recent years stating that since the cessation of French nuclear tests in the atmosphere three years earlier, short-lived radio-active products, such as iodine-131, had practically disappeared and long-lived products, such as strontium-90 and caesium-137, which posed little danger because of their very low doses, had also steadily decreased in the southern hemisphere.

31. French experts were carefully monitoring the development of that situation in collaboration with the Scientific Committee, in whose activities France was taking an active part.

32. Mr. SURYOKUSUMO (Indonesia) said that his delegation had always co-operated in the work of the Scientific Committee and would therefore join the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/32/L.1.

33. With regard to the Scientific Committee's report, it was gratifying to note the advances made in the investigation of the effects of low doses of radiation on humans. The Scientific Committee's work in the future would undoubtedly clarify other questions of equal importance.

34. Mr. GALLAGHER (Canada) announced that the delegations of El Salvador, Malaysia and the United Kingdom had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/32/L.1. On behalf of the sponsors, he introduced two amendments to the draft resolution: (a) in the third line of paragraph 6 the conjunction "or" should be deleted; and (b) paragraph 7 should be deleted and the subsequent paragraphs renumbered accordingly.
35. The CHAIRMAN, after announcing that Egypt and the Federal Republic of Germany had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution, said that, in conformity with the practice of previous years, he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft resolution, as orally amended, without submitting it to a vote.
36. It was so decided.
37. Draft resolution A/SPC/32/L.1, as orally amended, was adopted.
38. Mr. WHISTLER (United States of America) said that his delegation had been happy to join in supporting the draft resolution just adopted. He congratulated the scientists who had taken part in the preparation of the Scientific Committee's report, and he hoped that the Secretary-General would make an effort to ensure the widest possible distribution for the report and its annexes.
39. Research on that subject was being conducted in various countries. There was a need, at the very least, to monitor closely the radio-active fall-out levels in the atmosphere and in man, the proposition which had given birth to the Scientific Committee. His delegation therefore believed that the Scientific Committee should continue its work and should submit an eighth report.
40. The CHAIRMAN said that the consideration of agenda item 54 was now concluded. He reminded the members of the Committee that consideration of agenda item 55 would begin at the following meeting, on the morning of Thursday, 27 October, when the Commissioner-General of UNRWA would present his report to the General Assembly and the general debate on the item would begin.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.