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CONTENTS

Chairman: Mr. Yordan TCHOBANOV (Bulgaria).

AGENDA ITEM 24

Report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/4881 and Corr.1; A/SPC/L.68, L.69 and Add.1)

1. Mr. TREMBLAY (Canada) said that as a result of the concern expressed by the Canadian and other delegations, agenda item 24, relating to the effects of radiation, had been placed first on the Committee's agenda. The Canadian delegation and twenty-four other co-sponsors had now put forward a draft resolution on that subject (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1). The long list of co-sponsors and their broad geographical distribution bore witness to the depth and extent of international concern over the growing menace of radio-active fall-out. Many delegations other than the co-sponsors had also expressed their support for the aims of the draft resolution.

2. The Canadian Government had been actively represented on the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation since its establishment in 1955. Canada had also played a leading part in defining the Scientific Committee's current terms of reference and had sought to intensify the efforts to promote knowledge of the effects of radiation. It had offered—as had thirteen other Member States and two specialized agencies—to share its facilities for analysing radio-active samples with other countries and a number of countries had already taken advantage of those facilities or were arranging to do so. Thus the Canadian Government had for long been deeply concerned about the harmful effects of radiation. The recent resumption of nuclear weapons testing in the atmosphere had greatly intensified that concern. The Secretary of State for External Affairs of Canada, speaking in the General Assembly (1022nd plenary meeting), had reported sharp increases in the level of radio-active fall-out over the major cities of Canada. The figures were already disturbing and although it was not certain what further increases could be expected as a result of the resumed tests, past experience had shown that a large portion of the radio-active fall-out was likely to be delayed.

3. Canada was situated in the latitudes which seemed to have received some of the heaviest concentrations of radio-active fall-out. Nevertheless, he was sure that Canada's anxiety was shared by the people of every nation represented in the Committee, for there were too many uncertainties. The long-term effects of exposure were not yet clearly established and some might not appear for many years. Thus, generations yet unborn might also suffer, to an extent which could not yet be measured. Moreover, some individuals were more susceptible than others to the harmful consequences of radiation. There might be some disagreement about the precise level of radiation that would pose an immediate threat to humanity, but it was beyond dispute that all radiation presented a potential hazard and that higher levels increased that hazard. Every detail learnt about the nature and extent of the consequences of radiation confirmed further the gravity of the situation, and the fact that there was still so much to learn about its long-term effects was but a further cause for anxiety.

4. The draft resolution which Canada had joined in putting before the Committee (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1) was intended to register the anxiety felt among the Members of the United Nations about the growing threat to which mankind was being exposed. It was unacceptable, by any standard for the conduct of international relations, that any State should by its action cause the population of other States, and their descendants, to be exposed to incalculable risks. It was the responsibility of the General Assembly to make that point firmly and clearly. The Committee must, therefore, not pass lightly over the progress report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/4881 and Corr.1). In dealing with it, it must take into account the current developments, which had such direct and important implications for the studies being carried out by the Scientific Committee. The Scientific Committee itself recognized in its report that the resumption of nuclear test explosions increased the urgency for the intensification of relevant scientific studies. The routine and almost casual manner in which the draft resolution submitted by the Czechoslovak delegation (A/SPC/L.68) treated the item, despite the present disturbing circumstances, was quite inappropriate. The item in question was the only one on the agenda of the sixteenth session of the General Assembly dealing specifically with the consequences of atomic radiation, and the Assembly must take positive and substantive action on it.

5. The resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1) was in no way intended to broach the complex question of effective and practical arrangements for achieving a cessation of nuclear weapons tests. The Canadian position on that issue was well known: Canada was firmly opposed to the testing of nuclear weapons, both because of the radiation hazard posed by such tests and because of their contribution to the development of increasingly terrible weapons of war. That attitude would continue to be stressed in the appropriate forum, the First Committee of the General Assembly.

The Special Political Committee was concerned with one specific aspect of the dangers associated with the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere. The hazards posed by the sharp increases in radio-active fall-out which had indisputably followed the resumption of nuclear weapons testing, called for the urgent examination of the situation by the Special Political Committee. It was not only appropriate, but imperative, in the light of recent developments, that the various lines of study being carried out by the Scientific Committee should be given renewed emphasis.

6. The first preambular paragraphs of part I of the draft resolution recorded deep and universal concern about increasing levels of radio-active fall-out. The second preambular paragraph particularly stressed apprehension about the cumulative effects of exposure to increasing levels of radiation over a long period. Operative paragraph 1 of part I of the draft resolution contained a declaration regarding the responsibility of all States concerning actions which might have harmful biological consequences for the existing and future generations of peoples of other States, by increasing the levels of radio-active fall-out. The operative part of the draft resolution went on to draw particular attention to the Committee's view that recent developments increased the urgency for intensification of relevant scientific studies, and reaffirmed the desirability of continuing full international co-operation and making available to the Committee the results and experience of research conducted at the national level, so that the second comprehensive report to be presented in 1962 would be as scientifically authoritative and informative as possible.

7. The sponsors also considered it important that the preparation of the comprehensive report should be expedited as far as possible, in view of the mounting international concern about the effects of radiation. Operative paragraph 6 of part I also requested the Scientific Committee to consider whether the facts at its disposal called for the submission of an interim report. In establishing the Scientific Committee's original terms of reference (resolution 913 (X)), the General Assembly had specifically provided for such a possibility.

8. The main work of the Scientific Committee was concerned with assessing the biological implications for mankind of exposure to radiation. The present increase in radio-active fall-out meant that that particular aspect of the radiation problem demanded special study. Part II of the draft resolution, therefore, sought to amplify the information available about the world-wide incidence and distribution of radio-active fall-out, through the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). WMO's facilities enabled it to collect, co-ordinate and distribute accurate information about atmospheric phenomena in all parts of the world. It was thus uniquely suited to assist in increasing the extent and accuracy of knowledge of concentrations of radio-active fall-out and the pattern of movement of such concentrations. It was also well equipped to summarize and disseminate such information throughout the world, without delay and on a regular basis. One of the disturbing aspects of the current increase in average levels of fall-out was the fact that the information was so incomplete. No regular records of fall-out levels were kept over large areas of the world and it was possible that the populations of those areas were being exposed to equal or even greater danger than was suggested by the levels recorded in places where statistics were kept. Moreover, there was a great deal to be learned about the movements of fall-out systems and the duration of concentrations in particular areas. It was logical, therefore, that the United Nations should turn to the appropriate specialized agency for the collection and distribution of data regarding levels of atmospheric radio-activity. The distribution of the data would also help to keep world public opinion alert to one of the most critical of all contemporary problems.

9. The main purposes of the joint draft resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1) were, therefore, to register in unmistakable terms the concern of mankind at the growing hazards of radio-active fall-out, to seek to direct renewed and increased efforts to the pursuit of scientific studies and improve knowledge of radiation problems so as to find ways of averting the dangers suggested by recent evidence; finally, to make the world community acutely aware of the menace to which the generations of today with the future were being exposed, in order to bring the pressure of world opinion to bear and so reverse the present disturbing trend.

10. Mr. FUKUSHIMA (Japan) said that his delegation had supported the Canadian proposal to give priority to the discussion of the Scientific Committee's report (A/4881 and Corr.1). The same reasons had also impelled it to associate itself with twenty-four other nations in co-sponsoring the joint draft resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1).

11. He reminded the Committee that the Japanese people had experienced the bitter reality of radiation after-effects and were therefore deeply disturbed over the recent rise in radio-active fall-out following the resumption of nuclear testing. He was sure that that concern was shared by an overwhelming majority of the peoples of the world and he believed that the General Assembly should express it in unequivocal terms. There had been a sharp increase in radio-active fall-out in recent weeks over several of Japan's largest cities. Similar reports of increased atmospheric pollution had been received from various parts of the world. It was ironical that nuclear weapons tests should have been resumed at the very time when the Scientific Committee was holding its tenth session to discuss its forthcoming comprehensive report on the effects of radiation on living cells, on individuals and the hereditary effects.

12. A detailed explanation of the purposes and principles of the draft resolution had been given by the Canadian representative. In the view of the Japanese delegation the Scientific Committee was solely responsible for studying the effects of atomic radiation from the scientific point of view. The Japanese delegation did not wish to anticipate the results of the Scientific Committee's inquiry, which would be reported to the General Assembly in due course, but meanwhile it was agreed that there was a serious risk of harmful biological consequences from increased exposure to radio-active fall-out. Clearly, no State with a respect for human rights and welfare should continue any action which would entail the risk of those effects.

13. The work of the Scientific Committee could not be fully productive without help from outside sources. The report indicated that, so far, it had profited greatly from the assistance of Member States, specialized agencies and various international commis-

sions. There were references to the desirability of continued international co-operation in several paragraphs of the draft resolution. He noted that Japan was represented on the Scientific Committee and that the Japanese Government had contributed to the fullest possible extent to its work. The unique data which Japan was in a position to supply had been particularly valuable. The Japanese Government pledged itself to continue its full support and hoped that other Governments would do likewise. The Japanese delegation warmly appreciated the important work done by the Scientific Committee. It had no wish to increase the Scientific Committee's burden prematurely, but as it itself had recognized, the resumption of nuclear test explosions had increased the urgency for the intensification of relevant scientific studies. The Assembly would be justified, therefore, in asking the Scientific Committee to explore the possibility of accelerating its second comprehensive report and to consider the possible submission of an interim report.

14. The Japanese delegation had studied the Czechoslovak draft resolution (A/SPC/L.68) with care. It felt that the draft resolution failed altogether to treat the item as an important matter of substance, as the Special Political Committee had agreed to do when it decided to give it priority. All the substantive points in the Czechoslovak resolution were embodied in the joint draft resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1), which went on to deal with several other aspects of the radiation problem in terms that reflected more faithfully the deep and genuine world-wide concern. He trusted that when the Committee voted on the draft resolutions, the joint draft resolution would receive overwhelming support.

15. Mr. PUDLAK (Czechoslovakia) said that the question of the study of the effects of atomic radiation had always been of concern to his delegation, which had been a co-sponsor of resolution 1574 (XV) adopted by the General Assembly at the fifteenth session. The Czechoslovak delegation had carefully studied the report now before the Committee (A/4881 and Corr.1), a report which, although only a preliminary one, gave a very satisfactory indication of the scope of the work being undertaken by the Scientific Committee. Czechoslovakia was represented on the Scientific Committee which had made considerable progress in the study of the problem during its two recent sessions, and substantially more information was now available than at the beginning of the Scientific Committee's activities; that information had permitted a deeper understanding of the effects of radiation and had served to confirm the complexity of the matter. Paragraph 10 of the report made it clear that the Scientific Committee had received support from Member States, specialized agencies and their members, and individual scientists, and it was to be hoped that all these would continue their support. The report also stated that the Scientific Committee was preparing a comprehensive survey to be submitted at the seventeenth session of the General Assembly which would doubtless provide matter for more detailed discussion and enable conclusions to be drawn.

16. His delegation had been opposed to giving priority to the progress report for practical reasons: it was an interim report and provided no matter for detailed discussion. Further it might serve as a pretext for an undesirable political discussion. A week had elapsed since the last meeting, and none of the delegations which had requested priority for the item had submitted a draft resolution; his delegation had therefore submitted a draft resolution (A/SPC/L.68). That draft resolution could well provide the basis for the Committee's discussions and its adoption should satisfy all delegations which had no reservations regarding the work of the Scientific Committee; it contained no controversial matter, avoided unnecessary repetition of the wording of the report, and did not seek to interfere in the Committee's work.

17. The draft resolution submitted on the initiative of the Canadian delegation, and co-sponsored by a number of other delegations A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1, contained, in addition to the uncontroversial matter which was also embodied in the Czechoslovak draft resolution, much that was inappropriate or superfluous. For example, the strong language used in the preamble was clearly to be understood in the light of the present international situation, and if the international situation should change it might be asked whether the sponsors would not then seek to minimize the dangers they were endeavouring to exaggerate. The experience of previous years and the record of the United States with regard to atmospheric tests gave grounds for anticipating such a change.

18. In addition, the requests for accelerating the preparation of the comprehensive report and for the submission of an interim report seemed unrealistic, as also was the request addressed to WMO, an organization whose sphere of competence was unrelated to the matter of atomic radiation. It might also be asked whether a request to carry out a certain scheme if it was found "feasible" was appropriate in a formal resolution; such suggestions could be put forward in the Committee's discussions, the records of which would be available to the Scientific Committee; it would be its responsibility to decide what was practicable. His impression was that the sponsors had merely been concerned in increasing the length of the draft resolution.

19. He noted that the joint draft resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1) approved the report, instead of taking note of it like the Czechoslovak draft resolution (A/SPC/L.68). Such a wording seemed inappropriate in a progress report that contained no substantive proposals. What was more, the draft resolution was self-contradictory since, after approving the report, it made proposals which were at variance with it. For example, the appeal for the acceleration of the comprehensive report and the submission of an interim report, implied that the sponsors were not in agreement with paragraph 14 of the present report. Similarly, it was not clear whether the sponsors endorsed the proposal in paragraph 7 of the report regarding the date of the eleventh session, or whether they were suggesting an earlier date.

20. He trusted that the Czechoslovak draft resolution (A/SPC/L.68) would be adopted, and that the Special Political Committee would avoid any unnecessary duplication of the discussions in the First Committee. Propaganda of any kind would prejudice the work of the Scientific Committee whose approach must remain purely scientific.

21. Mr. GARCIA PIÑEIRO (Argentina) recalled that the General Assembly, in establishing by its resolution 913 (X) the Scientific Committee had recognized the importance of problems relating to the effects of ionizing radiation and the need for the widest distribution of scientific data on the matter. The work of

the Scientific Committee of which Argentina was a member, had been particularly valuable in that it had been conducted on purely scientific lines. Argentina had co-operated with the Committee by contributing information obtained from recording stations distributed over its territory. That country was also making an effort to develop all the peaceful applications of nuclear energy; indeed, it was recognized as one of the most advanced countries in nuclear technology in its geographical area, and it was no accident that an Argentinian, who was already the Chairman of the National Atomic Energy Commission of Argentina and the President of the Inter-American Commission for Nuclear Energy, had been elected President at the recent fifth regular session of the General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

22. In previous years the present item had been dealt with without prolonged discussion, but now the Committee had before it two draft resolutions having divergent aims. Whereas the Czechoslovak draft resolution (A/SPC/L.68) confined itself to taking note of the report and of the fact that a comprehensive report was to be submitted in 1962, the draft resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1), of which his delegation was a co-sponsor, giving heed to the alarm expressed in paragraph 12 of the Committee's report, asked for something more than mere approval of the report.

23. Atomic energy had a dual aspect; it had been clearly established that the world had need of atomic energy to compensate for its diminishing fuel resources, while in industry, medicine, agriculture and metallurgy the potentialities of the atom were incalculable. At the same time, however, the resumption of nuclear test explosions referred to in paragraph 12 of the report presented the world with a grave threat. The technique of nuclear explosions was being perfected daily, but there were no means for controlling the harmful effects of those explosions. The dangers resulting from radiation, including the genetic effects and the action of carbon-14, were already known. It was the responsibility of the General Assembly to warn the world, by every means at its disposal, of the dangers resulting from radiation, particularly in the light of the information given by the representatives of Canada and Japan regarding the increase in atmospheric radio-activity.

24. The joint draft resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1) had no political implications, but the sponsors believed that there was a unanimous desire to ascertain the effects of the renewed discharge of radioactive debris into the atmosphere and to ensure that all States understood their tremendous responsibility in the matter. For those reasons the draft resolution sought to expedite the second comprehensive report and asked for an interim report. He did not believe that anyone would oppose the quest for more precise knowledge regarding the dangers to mankind. It was not for the Special Political Committee to discuss the need for a nuclear test ban, but it was the Committee's duty to pass on the results of the Scientific Committee's investigations; if the data it provided indicated the prospect of dangerous radio-activity levels, it was fervently to be hoped that the warning would be heeded.

25. Mr. PLAJA (Italy) said that although the report before the Committee was only a progress report, of a formal nature, and might not seem to call for a substantive discussion, the present situation relating to the problem of exposure to radiation was such as to require that even more careful consideration should be given to the activities of the Scientific Committee than was the case in the past years. As the report itself stated in paragraph 12, the recent resumption of nuclear test explosions increased the urgency for intensified scientific research. The Special Political Committee was not called upon to consider the grave political consequences with regard to the armaments race ensuing from the unilateral resumption of nuclear tests; however, it could not shun its responsibilities in respect of the general concern due to the health hazards resulting from fall-out because of those tests. That question affected the lives of human beings and could not be dismissed as a mere cold war issue.

26. At the present stage, it was only possible to make an approximate evaluation of the recent tests, but an increase in levels of radiation due to fall-out had been observed, and a sharp increase in those levels was yet to be expected.

27. The situation, he added, gave rise to concern, especially as recent findings indicated that the residence time of fission products in the atmosphere was very short when they had been injected in polar latitudes, particularly in the autumn, and that debris, on reaching the ground, would therefore contain, in addition to long-lived nuclides, a certain amount of short-lived nuclides, which would add appreciably to the over-all exposure of mankind.

28. In that light it was only appropriate that the Special Political Committee should register its apprehension and express an appeal for caution.

29. He also agreed that an intensified effort was needed in scientific studies of radiation effects. He hoped that the second comprehensive report, some of the topics of which were set out in paragraph 6 of the report before the Committee, would provide the General Assembly at its seventeenth session with an authoritative account of the consequences of the recent tests in terms of the contamination of man's environment. The General Assembly had always credited the Scientific Committee with outstanding competence and integrity; it was thus to be expected that, in preparing the second comprehensive report, it would not fall short of the standards to which its past achievements bore eloquent testimony.

30. Italy, for its part, would continue to co-operate to the utmost with the Scientific Committee by supplying relevant information and the assistance of qualified experts, as well as by making available laboratory facilities to other countries which might be interested in using them, for the purpose of increasing an international exchange of knowledge in that field.

31. In that spirit he considered the joint draft resolution (A/SPC/L.69 and Add.1) most timely and desirable. On the other hand, the draft resolution submitted by Czechoslovakia (A/SPC/L.68) did not meet the views of his delegation as it appeared to reflect a deliberately innocuous approach inconsistent with the points he had raised.

The meeting rose at 4.25 p.m.

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