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**CONTENTS**

<i>Agenda item 68:</i>	
<i>Question of French nuclear tests in the Sahara</i>	
<i>(continued)</i>	
<i>General debate (continued) . . . . .</i>	<i>117</i>

Chairman: Mr. Franz MATSCH (Austria).

**AGENDA ITEM 68**

**Question of French nuclear tests in the Sahara (A/4183,  
A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1, A/C.1/L.239) (continued)**

**GENERAL DEBATE (continued)**

1. Mr. TARABANOV (Bulgaria) thought that the question of French nuclear tests in the Sahara might, as it developed, have considerable repercussions on a large number of international problems, including certain aspects of the disarmament problem. The question went far beyond the bounds of France's relations with other nations: it was closely linked with the attitudes of the various countries towards the disarmament problem. Given those positions of principle and present developments in the international situation, his delegation could not, despite Bulgaria's friendly feelings towards France, do other than say that it could not concur with France's intention to carry out nuclear tests in the Sahara. The Bulgarian Government had always condemned the policy of continuing nuclear weapons tests, as it was convinced that an unconditional cessation of tests would be the first decisive step towards disarmament.

2. The arguments designed to create the impression that the French nuclear explosions would have no harmful effect were unacceptable: the danger of such experiments had been irrefutably proved both by the members of the First Committee at the previous session and by leading scientists. The European Federation against Atomic Armaments had stated, for instance, that an explosion in the Sahara might very well have the effect of appreciably increasing radioactivity in unpredictable areas thousands of kilometres away. Data collected by the Meteorological Institute of Sofia showed that Bulgaria was in a region over which air masses from North Africa frequently passed, as on several occasions minute particles of African sand had been found in Bulgaria. Consequently, the statement to the effect that tests in the Sahara would be carried out only under favourable weather conditions, so that all radio-active matter would be carried away to uninhabited areas, was not based on scientific data; there was already adequate proof that the dissemination and concentration of radio-active substances were dependent on weather conditions, which could never be predicted with sufficient accuracy. Moreover it would be interesting to know whether France intended to carry out one experiment only or

whether it proposed to carry out others later, especially as in certain countries where hundreds of tests had already taken place there were people who were maintaining that tests should be resumed in the interests of national defence.

3. It was significant that France should have stated its intention of proceeding to experiments in the Sahara at a time when the negotiations between the nuclear Powers made it permissible to hope that an agreement on the cessation of nuclear weapons tests would shortly be concluded. Apart from their harmful effects, the tests proposed might have an adverse influence on those negotiations. In those circumstances, any argument designed to justify the tests in the Sahara or anywhere else could only serve the selfish interest of circles which, in certain countries, were trying to persuade their Governments to continue nuclear weapons tests and, therefore, the armaments race. When the representative of France had said (1043rd meeting) that the French experiment might make it possible to hasten a general agreement on disarmament by demonstrating the weakness of monopolies based on secrets which could not be kept for long, he was using a futile argument. If France was trying by that means to bring pressure to bear on the Soviet Union, there was no need to do more than point out that it was precisely the Soviet Union which had proposed the inclusion in the agenda (A/4218) of item 70 relating to general and complete disarmament, together with the immediate cessation of nuclear weapons tests and the prohibition of atomic and hydrogen weapons. If, on the other hand, France was trying to bring pressure to bear on its own allies in order to persuade them to give up nuclear armaments, its efforts would be fruitless, as their only effect would be to encourage those who were trying to persuade the Western statesmen to continue nuclear weapons tests. France had other and much wider opportunities for exerting a beneficial influence in that field. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that others might have recourse to the French delegation's argument in an attempt to justify possible experiments on their own part, which would mean that additional obstacles would be placed in the way of an agreement on disarmament: further development of nuclear weapons would complicate the exercise of control, a problem which had always provided the Western Powers with a pretext for preventing the conclusion of a disarmament agreement.

4. It was accordingly to be hoped that the United Nations would clearly and categorically decide in favour of the cessation of nuclear weapons tests, particularly the French experiments in the Sahara. His delegation also hoped that the French Government would rescind its decision, to the satisfaction of all nations—which would contribute effectively to the success of the Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests, and hasten the development of future negotiations on disarmament.

5. Mr. PAZHWAQ (Afghanistan) said that his country lay a long distance away from the Sahara and enjoyed the most cordial relations with France; but it had voted for the inclusion in the agenda of the item involved, and was a sponsor of the twenty-two-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1), because it was quite sincerely concerned at the French decision to conduct nuclear tests. Afghanistan had always expressed its disapproval of nuclear tests in general, whichever countries undertook them, wherever they took place and whatever the size of the bombs used.

6. The French position should not, of course, be misunderstood. It would be wrong to think that France was not a great Power, and unfair to believe that it should not be one. The concern of all countries, including France, to ensure their security was readily understandable. But a better course was open to France—to follow the example it had itself set for many years, and persuade the other nuclear Powers to put a stop to tests, especially at a time when the tests had already been interrupted and when negotiations were continuing with a view to their complete cessation. Such an attitude would certainly receive support from the whole world and would increase the prestige of France.

7. Moreover, other countries had probably reached the same stage as France in the perfection of nuclear weapons. If the United Nations approved the French decision, there would be no reason for stopping those other countries. Yet if every country able to explode bombs were authorized to do so, the concern expressed by the United Nations and the efforts which were being made to bring about a renunciation of nuclear weapons would no longer have any sense.

8. The statement which the French representative had made raised two questions. Did his country hope, by testing a single small atomic bomb, to lessen the feeling of insecurity occasioned in it by the atomic arms race of the other three Powers? Or, if it intended to undertake, at a later date, bigger tests for reasons of security, how could it now stress the smallness of its present bomb and say that the testing of it was less dangerous than that of other Powers? If the striving for equality of power in that field was to become the rule, an end to the arms race could hardly be hoped for and France could hardly expect to see other countries eventually giving up their nuclear weapons. Whereas the French statement sought to reassure the peoples of Africa, the French decision should be looked at from the standpoint of the fear which it could arouse in the whole world.

9. His delegation did not blame France for wishing to maintain its prestige as a great Power. A nation's desire to obtain the position, in any international club, to which its capabilities entitled it, and to assume the responsibilities involved by that position, was legitimate. But the manner in which France proposed to achieve that aim could not be approved. It would be better for its prestige if it became a member of the "nuclear club" by joining in the current negotiations for the cessation of tests. He asked why France should not try, through the United Nations, to safeguard its prestige without having to maintain its decision.

10. Some of the French representative's statements had implied that his country's present attitude had been determined by a certain disappointment. If that was the case, it would be right to appeal not only to

France but also to the other nuclear Powers. Some of them had given the impression that they saw no reason why France should not carry out its decision; they regarded the safety precautions taken by the French Government in connexion with the nuclear explosion in the Sahara as satisfactory. The confidence in France thus expressed by certain members of the "nuclear club" should cause them to think that there must be other ways of giving effect to that country's legitimate rights. His delegation would welcome and support any proposal which could give satisfaction to France while rendering any further nuclear tests, including that of France, unnecessary.

11. The twenty-two-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1) was simply an appeal to France, not an order. It expressed the uneasiness of the whole world, and was addressed, not only to France, but to all existing nuclear Powers, and to all countries, whether Members of the United Nations or not, who were engaged in or might engage in the preparation of similar tests. He stressed the special responsibility of the United Nations in regard to the health, safety and welfare of all mankind, and especially of certain dependent peoples, threatened by those tests, whose anxiety the Organization could not ignore.

12. The Afghan delegation, having shown the spirit in which it for its part was submitting the draft, hoped that conditions would be created leading to a favourable reply from France to the Organization's appeal.

13. Prince ALY KHAN (Pakistan) recalled that his delegation was strongly opposed to the continuation of nuclear and thermo-nuclear tests. For that reason it had warmly welcomed the substantial progress so far made at the Geneva Conference towards a complete and permanent cessation of such tests, and the good spirit in which the negotiations had recently been resumed. It would deplore any step which might impair those efforts. It could only regret, therefore, the French Government's decision to carry out experimental explosions in the Sahara. It hoped that the French Government would take into account the opinion of the rest of the world, which had been expressed in the course of the present debate.

14. Even were it admitted, despite differing opinions on the matter, that the danger from the tests proposed was very small, the struggle for material supremacy between the great Powers, which was characterized by the race in nuclear arms, would inevitably lead to universal destruction, anarchy and chaos.

15. Certain recent events had brought a few breaks in the clouds. The talks at Camp David had been followed at the United Nations by the unanimous adoption of a resolution on general and complete disarmament. The work of the Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests, recently resumed at Geneva, had good prospects of success, and the nuclear Powers were continuing to suspend tests. Unfortunately, that encouraging trend was thwarted by the policy of the French Government. The French attitude was difficult to understand, because France had no need to explode an atomic bomb in the Sahara for its greatness to be recognized and respect to be paid to it. A country's prestige was measured, not by its material and military power, but rather by its con-

tribution to the welfare of man, to his safety and not to his destruction. France had always been a world pioneer in philosophy, in literature, in art and in science. It was therefore inconceivable that that country's position could depend on the success of an explosion in the Sahara, especially as France could already be regarded as a nuclear Power, since it was able to manufacture atomic bombs.

16. Whatever might be the outcome of present and future negotiations, France should play in them a part of the first importance. Its participation in the Geneva negotiations on the cessation of nuclear tests would greatly increase the chances of their success.

17. Accordingly, his delegation would vote in favour of the twenty-two-Power draft resolution in the hope that France, freely exercising its sovereign rights, would reconsider its decision and assume its rightful place in the front rank of the great Powers, which were endeavouring to bring about a permanent and complete cessation of nuclear tests throughout the world.

18. Mr. MATSUDAIRA (Japan) said that his Government had, on principle, consistently voiced its disapproval of all nuclear weapons tests, irrespective of the country holding them or the place where they were carried out. He recalled both the various protests which Japan had made to the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union concerning each of their nuclear tests and the resolutions adopted by the Japanese Diet for the suspension of nuclear weapons tests. All those records, he pointed out, would show that Japan was determined to defend one principle which it believed to be a most crucial and important part of the fabric of the new world order—namely, that the uses of atomic energy should be developed solely for peaceful purposes. It was only by the application of that principle that humanity could survive, he stressed, and the first practicable step to take to attain that objective under present circumstances was, he believed, the suspension of tests. His delegation had, however, never wished to accuse, offend or embarrass any of the countries concerned, with all of which Japan maintained friendly relations.

19. True to its principles and the policy it had previously followed with regard to the explosions carried out by the other nuclear Powers and despite the ties of deep friendship and admiration which linked it with France, Japan had the painful duty of expressing its disapproval of the French atomic tests in the Sahara. The uncertainty as to whether the harmful effects of the explosions on neighbouring populations could be neutralized had been confirmed by the Bikini tests, although they were not a conclusive example in all respects. Moreover, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had recommended (A/3838) the cessation of explosions of nuclear weapons because of their danger to mankind. It was to be feared—in another connexion—that the French nuclear tests in the Sahara would undermine the negotiations at Geneva, which were approaching a successful agreement on the suspension of tests. The nuclear Powers had decided to suspend tests for the duration of the negotiations, and it was feared that the contemplated nuclear tests in the Sahara might undermine the result of patient endeavours and adversely affect the progress of the Geneva talks.

20. Japan desired, not only the cessation of nuclear tests, but also the cessation of the manufacture of nuclear weapons, the reconversion of existing stock-piles, and a prohibition on the possession and use of atomic weapons. These objectives could be attained only by the establishment of an effective international control and inspection system, which was essential to any kind of disarmament. Since it was precisely the negotiations on the suspension of tests which would make it possible to determine the form of that system, any measure which might impede their progress must be carefully avoided. For that reason, the Japanese delegation had decided to join the other sponsors of the twenty-two-Power draft resolution, since it was in agreement with its basic objective, though not necessarily with its wording or its scope.

21. Mr. ORMSBY-GORE (United Kingdom) said that it had long been his Government's declared policy to work for the cessation of all nuclear weapons tests under effective international control. It had in fact been the British Foreign Secretary who, on 2 July 1957, had suggested in the Sub-Committee of the Disarmament Commission that the problem should be approached from a technical standpoint. <sup>1/</sup>In the early part of 1958, the Soviet Union had concurred in that view, and at the ensuing Conference of Experts to Study the Possibility of Detecting Violations of a Possible Agreement on the Suspension of Nuclear Tests the conclusion had been reached that effective control was possible. Although the emergence of additional scientific data had given rise to certain difficulties, the latest information from Geneva warranted the hope that a solution would be found. The progress achieved thus far could be attributed to the patience shown by all the participants and to the important concessions which each had made.

22. When the negotiations began, the Government of the United Kingdom had believed that the establishment of a control organization to supervise the implementation of the cessation of all nuclear tests—an achievement which would be unique in the history of the post-war world—would prepare the way for further disarmament measures. At that time, his Government and the United States Government had both given an undertaking (A/3896/Rev.1, A/3895) to abstain from holding any nuclear tests for a year, if the USSR would do likewise. The United Kingdom was adhering to that commitment, and would not resume nuclear testing while useful discussions continued at Geneva. The United States had recently extended the moratorium on its testing programme until the end of 1959.

23. His Government's attitude was the best proof of its desire to reach a comprehensive agreement, open to all States, on the permanent cessation of all nuclear tests. That cessation, under effective international control, was the real objective—not just the stopping of one low-yield test series by the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union or the United States. The draft resolution deposited by Italy and the United Kingdom (A/C.1/L.239) bore witness to that constructive attitude. The other draft resolution (A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1), while emphasizing the potential dangers of the French tests, ignored the central issue: the cessation of all tests, by all countries, under effective international control.

<sup>1/</sup> See DC/SC.1/PV.128.

24. In his statement of 5 November (1044th meeting), he had sought to put the problem into perspective on the basis of the best scientific information thus far available. His delegation was fully aware of the real anxiety which the announcement of the French tests had aroused in Africa, particularly in such countries as Nigeria, for which the United Kingdom was still responsible. The present discussion had shown that such concern was shared by other countries. The constructive draft resolution which the two Powers had submitted for the Committee's consideration took account of those misgivings, as well as of the assurances which had been given by the representative of France in his important statement and of resolution 1252 A (XIII) adopted on the same subject at the previous session.

25. The twenty-two-Power draft resolution was a negative proposal. The General Assembly had never adopted a resolution designed to prevent the United States or the USSR or the United Kingdom from holding tests, doubtless because it had not believed it useful and had recognized that that was not the main issue. The Geneva Conference, and the adherence of all States to an agreement on the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests worded in such a way as to be acceptable to all, were much more important. The prize to be sought was the cessation of all nuclear tests, and the Committee should not allow itself to be diverted from the winning of it.

26. Mr. KURKA (Czechoslovakia) emphasized that the Conference of Independent African States, held at Monrovia in August 1959, and the statements made in the First Committee had shown what grave anxiety had been aroused in the world by the projected nuclear tests in the Sahara. His Government considered it necessary to prohibit nuclear weapons, eliminate them from countries' arsenals, halt their manufacture and destroy existing stockpiles. An agreement on the cessation of tests would be the first step in that direction. Encouraged by the progress made at the Geneva Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests, the Government and people of Czechoslovakia believed that any measure which might jeopardize the conclusion of an agreement on the permanent cessation of tests must be avoided. The French experiment was untimely. Mankind's hopes would be disappointed if other States disregarded the agreements of the three nuclear Powers and carried out tests.

27. The representative of France had asserted (1043rd meeting) that his country had the same right and duty as other countries to ensure its safety. Such a position, which opened the way to a nuclear weapons

race, endangered international peace and security. Only general and complete disarmament would make possible the maintenance of peace and security in the world, and States eager to achieve that objective should prove it by deeds.

28. Czechoslovakia shared the concern of the peoples of Africa regarding the effects which the French experiment might have on their health. The French representative's assertions as to the innocuousness of the experiments in the Sahara ran counter to the views of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, and of many other scientists. The specialists had concurred in acknowledging that all the harmful effects which a nuclear explosion might have were not yet known. Moreover, it was not true that radio-active contamination was restricted to a small surface in the area of the explosion. Atmospheric currents from the Sahara reached Europe with relative frequency and carried an easily identifiable dust to Czechoslovakia throughout the year. That fact had been confirmed by seventy-five years of observation at the Hydro-Meteorological Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. After the French test, that dust would be laden with radio-active elements. Winds from the Sahara also reached other countries in central, southern and south-east Europe. Warnings had been issued in France itself, including one by twenty-seven scientists who had found that strontium-90 accumulated in the human organism more rapidly than had previously been believed.

29. At a moment when the international situation was improving, when the peoples were placing all their hopes in the forthcoming summit conference, and when negotiations on general and complete disarmament were about to start, Governments had a duty to do their utmost to halt the armaments race. The Czechoslovak delegation would therefore be gratified if France renounced a project which caused so many nations grave concern, and it would vote in favour of the twenty-two-Power draft resolution.

30. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) asked the United Kingdom representative to specify whether operative paragraph 2 of the new draft resolution (A/C.1/L.239) referred to the views expressed by the delegations that opposed the nuclear test, or to those of the delegations that trusted in the assurances given by France.

31. Miss Warburton (United Kingdom) said that her delegation would reply to that question at the following meeting.

The meeting rose at 12.25 p.m.