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Chairman: Mr. Franz MATSCH (Austria).

AGENDA ITEM 68

Question of French nuclear tests in the Sahara (A/4183,  
A/C.1/L.238/Rev.1, A/C.1/L.239, A/C.1/L.240) (con-  
tinued)

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. BISBE (Cuba) said that the debate showed that the First Committee had been right in making the question of French nuclear tests in the Sahara the second item on its agenda, as the French Government appeared to be determined, regardless of any recommendations that might be made by the United Nations, to carry out a test which would expose African countries in the Sahara region to great danger. The debate was also a test of France's attitude to disarmament and of that of the three great Powers which formed the "nuclear club".

2. France rebelled against the monopoly in nuclear weapons held by the United States, the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, but was making every effort to become a member of the club. Its example might later be followed by some other Power. Monopolies were of course an evil in any field and France was right in asking that disarmament in the field of nuclear weapons should be undertaken by all the Powers, but it was impossible to approve the method it was using. As in fact it already possessed the atomic bomb, it was in a particularly good position to press for nuclear disarmament in the ten-Power disarmament committee without itself carrying out the proposed tests. It was wholly inconsistent to condemn the nuclear arms race and at the same time to endeavour to produce weapons of mass destruction. Mr. Moch's arguments to the contrary notwithstanding, it was inconceivable that the present nuclear Powers would disarm because France had become a nuclear Power. If, on the other hand, France announced to the world that it possessed the atomic bomb, but that instead of undertaking trials to prove the fact, it was inviting the three present nuclear Powers to begin nuclear disarmament, its attitude would undoubtedly have a decisive influence on the progress of disarmament.

3. The delegation of Morocco (1043rd meeting) and other delegations had shown that for various reasons, including the impossibility of controlling the movement and spread of radio-active fall-out, the intended tests were a real danger. Moreover, the time was particularly ill-chosen. The French test could not be

compared with those carried out by the other three nuclear Powers. The United States and the Soviet Union had conducted their tests in their own countries and only their own nationals had been exposed to danger. The United Kingdom tests had been carried out in Australia, a member country of the British Commonwealth, and there had been no objection on the part of the Australian people. The position was quite different in Africa, where the effects of the intended experiments, however slight, would affect peoples who were not French and who had asked the French Government to abandon its plans. It could not be agreed that France had the right to carry out nuclear tests in African territory in the face of the protests of States and peoples in areas adjoining the region chosen for the tests. In spite of the statements of the French representative (1043rd meeting), supported by the United Kingdom representative (1046th meeting), the harmful effects of a nuclear test were unforeseeable and incalculable, as was clear from a book on the subject by the science editor of *The New York Times*,<sup>1/</sup> who had a thorough knowledge of the question.

4. His delegation was not opposed to the intended tests because they were to be carried out by France, but simply because it objected to all nuclear tests; despite certain optimistic arguments, it did not believe that the existence of nuclear weapons was sufficient to prevent a world war. For that reason it believed that, in the field of nuclear weapons, the disarmament of the three Powers possessing such weapons should begin at once. All further tests should be prohibited, existing stocks should be eliminated, and the manufacture of new nuclear weapons should be stopped. Scientific progress in the atomic and every other field should be directed exclusively to industrial development and the welfare of mankind.

5. As the Indian representative had said (1045th meeting), the vote that would determine the outcome of the debate was the vote of France. If France had second thoughts and was true to the peaceful principles of Jaurès, its vote would not only earn the gratitude of the African peoples, but would make a decisive contribution to the cause of disarmament.

6. His delegation's vote for the twenty-two-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.238/Rev.1) would be, not against France, but for peace, disarmament and the respect which the great Powers owed to the other nations. He was confident that reason would ultimately triumph and earnestly hoped that the debate, far from harming the cause of disarmament, would further the principles and ideals which inspired the United Nations in its efforts to secure a lasting and universal peace.

7. Mr. FEKINI (Libya) said that his delegation's keen interest in the question of French nuclear tests

<sup>1/</sup> William L. Laurence, *Men and Atoms* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1959).

in the Sahara reflected the African peoples' legitimate concern in regard to the French Government's intentions, and the sincere desire of the Libyan Government and people to see the conclusion, at the earliest possible date, of a general agreement on the cessation of nuclear tests, followed by general and complete disarmament.

8. The world-wide anxiety caused by the dropping of the first two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had steadily increased over the past fourteen years as a result of the arms race which had followed the breaking of the atomic monopoly originally held by one Power. The appalling effects of the first two bombs on those who had escaped instantaneous annihilation and the unquestionably harmful consequences of subsequent nuclear tests had alarmed the peoples of the entire world. That reaction was not due to propaganda or mere emotion, but to an awareness of the real dangers to which present and future generations were being exposed as a result of the increasing pollution of the atmosphere and the threat of atomic war. The deep concern of public opinion had helped to make the question of nuclear tests and atomic weapons a fundamental issue in the United Nations, and had led the nuclear Powers to suspend their tests and embark on negotiations with a view to their final cessation.

9. That turn of events had unfortunately been jeopardized by France's declared intentions and had given place to legitimate anxiety, especially among the peoples of Africa, whether sovereign or dependent.

10. In face of the authoritative opinions of scientists, physicians and geneticists throughout the world and of the competent agencies in that field, in particular the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, the French representative's assurances concerning the harmlessness of the explosions to be carried out by France in the Sahara could only be regarded as special pleading. The fact that the French atomic bomb was small in comparison to thermo-nuclear bombs could not conceal the fact that it was of the same type as the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and that it was even more powerful.

11. His delegation had noted with particular concern that the winds in the area selected for the French tests blew eastward towards one of the three provinces of the Libyan federation, with dense population, rich vegetation and an important system of springs and subterranean rivers. The entire northern part of Libya would be in danger, as the sand winds blew towards the coast at all seasons.

12. It was surprising that the United Kingdom representative should be the technical champion of French atomic explosions in the Sahara, in view of his statements on general and complete disarmament (1029th meeting). It would have been more fitting if he had informed the First Committee of the fears and anxieties of the Government and the people of Nigeria and had left it to the United Nations to evaluate them. However, the support which certain Western European Powers gave one another was no novelty in the history of the African continent, and Africans were drawing the necessary conclusions.

13. Before deciding to turn to the United Nations, in accordance with a resolution adopted at the Conference of Independent African States, held at Monrovia in August 1959, the African States had made use of

all the normal channels in an attempt to convince France of the seriousness of the danger in which it was placing the peoples of Africa. The United Kingdom of Libya, which had achieved independence under the auspices of the United Nations, had special reasons for placing full confidence in the United Nations and for believing that it was the General Assembly's duty to use its high moral authority to remove the threat that was hanging over all the African peoples. The United Nations was under a special duty to preserve the health, security and well-being of the still dependent peoples of that continent.

14. In view of the efforts that were being made to achieve general and complete disarmament, including the current negotiations at the Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests, France's decision was a serious threat to the promising situation that now prevailed. France's intention ran counter to the vast movement throughout the world which had induced the nuclear Powers to endeavour to bring the tests to an end. Moreover the French nuclear tests would upset the delicate and conditional balance between the respective positions of the East and West, which had resulted in the *de facto* cessation of nuclear tests pending the conclusion of an agreement on their final discontinuance. In the light of the Soviet representative's statement that his country would refrain from carrying out nuclear explosions as long as the Western Powers did the same (1047th meeting), it seemed reasonable to suppose that as soon as the French atomic bomb was exploded, the race in nuclear explosions would begin again. The French tests might thus deal a fatal blow to the negotiations on the cessation of tests, an essential step towards general disarmament.

15. The true prestige of States was not measured by their physical strength or their weapons of mass destruction. On the contrary, it was based on the moral and political principles that guided their actions. For that reason, France would certainly have been much better advised to allow its scientists to continue the exclusively peaceful task which had originally been assigned to them. The French representative had stated (1043rd meeting) that France had decided to carry out nuclear explosions to ensure its own defence, but an alliance with countries equipped with all the necessary modern weapons seemed more likely to lead to the attainment of that objective. It might also be asked what the world would be like if all Powers of any importance followed the French example and equipped themselves with nuclear weapons.

16. If France carried out its intentions, the peoples of Africa might consider the nuclear tests in the Sahara as an act of provocation and an attempt to intimidate all the African States and all the national liberation movements in Africa. In view of the danger which the tests presented to the African peoples, his delegation hoped that the Committee would adopt the twenty-two-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.238/Rev.1).

17. The Italian representative had said (1049th meeting) that the Committee should consider the dangers which the proposed tests presented to the security and health of mankind, rather than the question of the cessation of nuclear tests or the right of France to become an atomic Power. Italy was a sponsor of a draft resolution (A/C.1/L.239) which dealt with the

very questions which the Italian delegation said were foreign to the current discussion. In the fourth paragraph of the preamble and in operative paragraph 1, France was considered as becoming an active member of the "atomic club" after the explosion of its bomb. The basic question of the anxieties of the African Governments and peoples, who were appealing for United Nations protection from imminent dangers, was simply avoided since France was merely requested to take full account of the views expressed in the debate. The Italian representative had also said that conversations were in progress between his country and France with regard to the hazards to which the Italian and African peoples might be exposed. In that connexion, it could be wished that the French Government would co-operate in the same spirit with the African Governments concerned. Finally it might be asked whether the Italian representative had taken into account the fact that there was a large Italian community of nearly 40,000 persons in Libya. His delegation would be unable to support the draft resolution submitted by Italy and the United Kingdom.

18. Mr. PETROS (Ethiopia), recalling that Ethiopia was one of the sponsors of the twenty-two-Power draft resolution, said that he deeply regretted being obliged to make such an appeal to France, in view of the friendship and the close intellectual and scientific co-operation which existed between the two countries. Ethiopia was opposed to the French nuclear tests on grounds of principle, as well as of continental and international solidarity. It had always spoken in favour of the unconditional cessation of tests and of the manufacture of nuclear weapons, in the United Nations and at the African-Asian Conference, held at Bandung in 1955, and at the Conferences of Independent African States. Moreover, radio-activity was no respecter of political frontiers and the African peoples would be the first victims of any tests carried out in the Sahara. Despite the French representative's efforts to demonstrate that the proposed experiment would have no harmful effects, there could be no doubt that, as had been confirmed by many scientists and by the United States Atomic Energy Commission, any nuclear explosion, regardless of its size, was dangerous, not only for the present generation, but also for future generations. That was why the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had recommended the complete cessation of tests, given the fact that the smallest amounts of radiation were liable to cause deleterious effects. Moreover, the representative of France on the Scientific Committee had recognized that fact himself since, when the general conclusions of the Committee's report were voted upon, he had supported the draft text of paragraph 54 of chapter VII submitted by India (A/3838, p. 41, footnote). It still had to be shown, therefore, how French tests could be harmless in 1959. In fact, there were no harmless explosions, regardless of their size and of any precautions which might be taken.

19. In addition, it was, to say the least, inopportune to propose carrying out such experiments at the very time when the nuclear Powers themselves had decided to suspend explosions during the negotiations on the cessation of tests, when there was hope that those negotiations would be successful and when the First Committee had just adopted a draft resolution on general and complete disarmament. France's decision

was highly unlikely to diminish international tension and it might even encourage other Governments to enter the race in nuclear weapons, which would involve France in grave responsibility.

20. It was not for the Committee to determine the reasons for the French decision; but the Ethiopian delegation urged France to give heed to the appeal of the African countries, and to renounce its nuclear tests in the Sahara. Such a decision could only do honour to a country whose important contribution to the welfare of mankind was universally recognized.

21. The CHAIRMAN drew the Committee's attention to the amendments submitted by the delegations of Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Panama (A/C.1/L.240) to the twenty-two-Power draft resolution, which had itself been revised (A/C.1/L.238/Rev.1).

22. Mr. TOURE (Guinea) recalled that his country was one of the co-sponsors of the draft resolution urging France to abstain from carrying out its tests. Whole-heartedly devoted to peace, the independent African States, whose basic principle was the fight against colonialism with a view to hastening the liberation process for all the African peoples, did not differentiate between the need to combat imperialism in Africa and the necessity of taking an active part in any movement designed to maintain and strengthen peace throughout the world.

23. There were good grounds for amazement at France's intentions. It might have been expected that, in face of the African peoples' irresistible surge towards total emancipation, France would have avoided finally alienating the friendship of those peoples by persisting in outworn political concepts, sufficiently illustrated by the tragedy in Algeria and the situation in the Cameroons. Moreover the French decision, taken at a moment when the three nuclear Powers were at an advanced stage in their negotiations on the total cessation of tests, was in flagrant contrast with the present relaxation of tension; were the interests of the French Government different from those of all the peoples of the world, including the French people? Lastly, France was choosing to explode its bomb at a time when the conquest of outer space was opening up an endless field for peaceful competition among scientists throughout the world. The French Government could hardly claim that it was essential to possess a small atomic bomb when the world was dominated by systems of alliances which already held thermo-nuclear weapons.

24. Despite the out-of-date nature of the French project, the amazement of the African peoples had given place to anxiety, for they knew that their existence was of small account to the colonialists: they recalled the 17,000 deaths which the 140 kilometres of Congo-Ocean railway had cost, the 100,000 persons killed in the repression of Madagascar, the Mau Mau massacres and the massacres now taking place in the Congo. The announcement of the French test had, therefore, occasioned the liveliest protests throughout Africa, in free and still dependent territories alike. Certain African States members of the French Community, like the Sudanese Republic, had taken a definite stand against the French project. The approaches made to the French Government by Ghana and Morocco had met with no success. Worse still, the French Government had taken no account of the resolution unanimously adopted by the Conference of

Independent African States, which at Monrovia had borne witness to the solidarity of the African peoples and their determination to combat all forms of foreign domination. The question under consideration, moreover, affected more than Africa: it was closely linked with the problem of the choice between peace, i.e., disarmament, and war, which was the inevitable outcome of the armaments race.

25. He asked what right the French Government had to carry out nuclear experiments on African territory against the wishes of the peoples most directly concerned. The French representative had offered no explanation whatever on that point. No one could argue that an area situated in the very heart of Africa was part of French national territory. In point of fact, the French Government knew quite well that the complete liberation of the African continent presupposed, within the very near future, the African States' sovereignty over their respective extensions in the Sahara. It might be wondered whether the aim of the French experiment was not to consolidate France's position in Africa by means of threats, for the small French bomb could be effective only at the level of colonial warfare.

26. The delegation of Guinea was opposed to the conducting of any nuclear experiments on foreign territory without the express consent of the indigenous peoples. Moreover, a sizable proportion of the French people was against the test. Despite the learned arguments of Mr. Moch, the delegation of Guinea believed in the reality of the danger from fall-out. It was true that the Republic of Guinea had no atomic scientists. After sixty years of colonial government, 93 per cent of its inhabitants were still illiterate. Guinea was making a supreme effort to prepare its young people for careers in all fields, including science, but it would not follow France's example and ask them to turn their energies in the direction of weapons of mass destruction.

27. He also wondered whether France would be content with exploding a single bomb. The delegation of Guinea would not await the reply to that question; it would adhere to its Government's policy, which was to condemn the very intention of carrying out such tests. In any event, given the low power of its bomb, the French Government ought to be in a position to renounce its experiment. Otherwise a vicious circle would materialize, since each State would be able to claim the right, for example, to possess hydrogen weapons before it would admit the need for prohibiting them.

28. The non-African countries, too, were exposed to the danger of fall-out. All nations, therefore, should pool their scientific knowledge and combine their efforts with a view to ensuring the security of their peoples. Scientists throughout the world, including such French scientists as Mr. Frédéric Joliot, had earned admiration for their tenacity in warning world opinion of the danger of nuclear weapons, while at the same time refusing to direct their own research towards that field. The French representative should realize that his Government's decision was based upon fear: a country must be afraid in order to think of possessing an atomic bomb. The colonial peoples wondered, for their part, whether the bomb was intended for defensive or aggressive purposes. They knew that the colonialists often passed off their aggressive ventures as defensive acts. In that con-

nexion, he quoted extracts from history and geography textbooks used in schools in various non-self-governing countries.

29. The representative of France had asked whether the role of the chief was to follow his troops or to lead them. In view of such contempt for the people, it was permissible to ask whether the French Government was not on the road towards fascism, to which the myth of the predestined man necessarily led. When Mr. Moch declared that democracy presupposed a constant effort to educate, it was natural to ask who was the educator and who the educated.

30. The independent States of Africa had observed with deep concern that the United Kingdom representative, after speaking of the United Kingdom's responsibilities towards certain peoples who had not yet attained independence (1044th meeting), had taken up a position against the twenty-two-Power draft resolution (1048th meeting).

31. With regard to the draft resolution submitted by the delegations of Italy and the United Kingdom, he noted with regret that it amounted to giving France a free hand—a situation irreconcilable with the unanimous wish of the vast majority of delegations. The whole principle of nuclear test explosions should be condemned outright. The African peoples would measure the desire of other countries to understand their problems by their attitude on the subject of the French nuclear tests. As the President of the Republic of Guinea, Mr. Sekou Touré, had said at the 837th plenary meeting of the present session of the General Assembly the most important question to be asked was not whether Africa belonged to one camp or the other, but whether the two camps, the East and the West, were for or against the liberation of Africa. Although the question of nuclear tests represented nothing but an attempt at colonial reconquest, it was for France's allies to make it understand that, as the representative of India had said (1045th meeting), no greater prestige attached in our day to the possession of a bomb than to the possession of slaves.

32. Mr. MOCH (France), exercising his right of reply, expressed surprise that a territorial claim on French departments in the Sahara should have been formulated during the current debate. Furthermore, the President of the Republic of the Ivory Coast, Mr. Houphouët-Boigny, and the President of the Malagasy Republic, Mr. Tsiranana, had been sitting with him and both were in full agreement with the French Government in the policy which it was following. With regard to the attacks against the colonial system, France condemned that system. As to the charge of fascism levelled against the representative of France, it was, to say the least, exaggerated.

33. Mr. Touré himself constituted evidence that the old régime had been able to produce educated men. He would have been fairer had he concluded that his country had obtained its independence not by revolt or violence, but through the offer of the President of France, General de Gaulle, to grant independence to all territories voting "no" in the 1958 referendum.

34. Mr. TOURE (Guinea), exercising his right of reply, asked the representative of France to declare formally, before the Assembly, that his country was ready to grant independence to all colonial peoples who asked for it. A specific offer of that kind would make it unnecessary for the Mali Federation to under-

take negotiations to secure its independence, which it had already claimed, and would make it possible to conclude that it was only by error that independence had not been offered to Algeria or, since 1947, to the Cameroons. Furthermore, at the time of the referendum, the French Government had conducted a certain kind of propaganda in Africa south of the Sahara, with all the financial resources which that required, and with the help of such men as Mr. Houphouet-Boigny, the man who had refused independence, and other puppets.

35. Mr. MOCH (France) said he would not dwell on the insult contained in the expression used by the

representative of Guinea about men whose only mistake was that they did not think as he did. He would simply point out that the question put by Mr. Touré had already been answered very clearly by General de Gaulle in his statement of 16 September with regard to Algeria and in his statement of 10 November with regard to the other members of the French Community.

36. The CHAIRMAN informed the Committee that Peru had added its name to those of the sponsors of draft resolution A/C.1/L.239.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.