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3rd meeting
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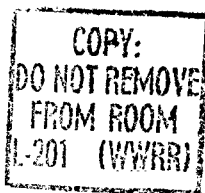
SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KORHONEN (Finland)

CONTENTS

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON
THE EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION



UN/SPC
8 OCT 20 1985
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8 October 1985

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/SPC/40/L.1)

1. The CHAIRMAN said that he had just been informed that Bishop Tutu wished to address the Special Political Committee's hearings on apartheid while at the United Nations on 28 October and that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to accommodate Bishop Tutu by changing the date for its two meetings devoted to hearings from 29 October to 28 October.

2. It was so decided.

3. The CHAIRMAN said that he wished to suggest modifications in the tentative timetable for the work of the Committee set out in document A/SPC/40/L.1. He suggested that the Committee should devote six consecutive meetings to item 79, on 29, 30 and 31 October. Two further meetings would be devoted to it between 20 and 22 November for consideration of draft resolutions. The Special Committee's report would be available in all languages by 16 October, and members would thus have time to study it before taking up the item. The starting date for item 79 should therefore be moved to 4 November and that for item 78 to 12 November. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee approved that modified programme of work.

4. It was so decided.

EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (A/40/417; A/SPC/40/L.2)

5. Mr. AOKI (Japan), introducing draft resolution A/SPC/40/L.2, said that his delegation was deeply concerned about the potentially harmful effects of atomic radiation and attached great importance to the work of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation because of its valuable contributions over the years. It hoped that the States Members of the United Nations, the States members of the International Atomic Energy Agency and other specialized agencies, and non-governmental organizations would join it in co-operating with the Committee by providing it with the information its work required. His delegation welcomed the report which the Scientific Committee had submitted to the General Assembly at its current session. Draft resolution A/SPC/40/L.2 was essentially identical to the one adopted the previous year, and his delegation, on behalf of the sponsors, hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

6. Mr. FALTZ (Luxembourg), speaking on behalf of the members of the European Community, said that over the past 30 years the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had made an invaluable contribution to a better understanding of the effects of ionizing radiation and its potential dangers. His delegation noted with satisfaction the excellent co-operation that had been established between the Scientific Committee and the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the World Health Organization and other scientific organizations and was convinced that it would continue to

(Mr. Faltz, Luxembourg)

receive from all parties concerned the information which it required for its work. It also hoped that a consensus resolution would be adopted requesting the Scientific Committee to pursue its work and that it would be able to publish in 1986 a report dealing essentially with some somatic and hereditary effects of ionizing radiation.

7. Mr. WOOLCOTT (Australia) said that the United Nations was concerned about the effects of atomic radiation, just as it was about the very existence of the planet, because of the development over the past 40 years of nuclear weapons of awesome destructive capacity. Instead of focusing merely on the symptoms of the disease, every opportunity must be taken to analyse the underlying problem and to find solutions rather than palliatives.

8. Analysis of the problem had convinced Australia to do all in its power to eliminate nuclear weapons. To that end, it had welcomed the success of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and had joined with like-minded countries in advocating a complete, universal and permanent ban on nuclear testing.

9. In August 1985, the Heads of Government of the States members of the South Pacific Forum had unanimously endorsed and opened for signature the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty. It reflected deep feelings about the nuclear-arms race, about continued nuclear testing, including, in particular, that of France in the region, about the importance of the non-proliferation régime and about proposals to dump nuclear waste in the oceans of the region. The parties to the Treaty would undertake not to develop, manufacture, acquire or receive from others any nuclear weapons. The Treaty contained provisions on nuclear testing, the non-stationing of nuclear weapons in the region and the strictly peaceful use of nuclear energy, subject to verification. It reflected the Forum's opposition to the dumping of nuclear waste at sea and also related directly to, and reaffirmed the importance of, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

10. A draft protocol to the Treaty invited France, the United States and the United Kingdom to apply its key provisions to their South Pacific Territories. Two other draft protocols invited the five nuclear-weapon States not to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against parties to the Treaty and not to test such weapons within the Zone. The South Pacific countries hoped for positive consideration of the draft protocols by the nuclear-weapon States so that they could be adopted at the next meeting of the Forum.

11. The adoption of the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty was a major achievement of relevance to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It was only the second nuclear-weapon-free zone treaty to cover an inhabited region of the world. Bordering as it did on the area of the Treaty of Tlatelolco and the Antarctic Treaty, it added significantly to the nuclear-free areas of the world.

12. His Government had vigorously condemned France's programme of nuclear tests at Mururoa Atoll in French Polynesia. In taking that action, it had joined its voice to those of all the other independent and self-governing Territories of the

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(Mr. Woolcott, Australia)

South Pacific. The entire region, voicing its concern through the 13 member countries of the South Pacific Forum, was united in outrage at the actions of France, the only nuclear-weapon State that continued to conduct nuclear tests in that part of the world.

13. In 1973, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand had referred to the International Court of Justice the question of French nuclear testing in the atmosphere in the South Pacific, with the result that atmospheric testing in the region had ceased. Despite, however, the clearly expressed, persistent and total opposition of the countries of the region, France continued to conduct underground nuclear tests at Mururoa. That practice was an affront to the region and a wilful defiance of the aspirations of the people of the region to live in a nuclear-free zone.

14. France should harbour no illusions about its capacity to dismiss the problem as unimportant and to play its deadly games undisturbed. His Government saw no reason for the people of the South Pacific to accept testing by France in their region. It totally rejected the argument that the tests were safe; if France truly believed that, why did the French Government not try to convince its own people of the fact and conduct the tests in France? The answer was clear. France conducted the tests because it believed it could do so with impunity on what, for it, was the other side of the world. No one should be surprised that those more directly affected should view the matter very differently.

15. The Australian Government and people had no faith in French assurances concerning the need for and the safety of the testing programme. Recent actions deliberately undertaken by the French Government in support of its totally unjustifiable policy gave them even less cause for reassurance.

16. It gave him no pleasure to speak in such terms of France, a country with which Australia enjoyed otherwise excellent relations and one which had, moreover, enriched the region in many ways. Like France, Australia would like to see an end to recrimination and to the shadow that the issue had cast over France's name in the Pacific. That would, however, require an end to testing.

17. Mr. LAGORIO (Argentina) said that the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had made important contributions over the past 30 years in assessing radiation doses, effects and risks and that his country would continue to support it actively. In connection with paragraph 5 of document A/40/417, his delegation welcomed the fact that the Scientific Committee had made plans to publish in 1986 a report dealing essentially with some somatic and hereditary effects of ionizing radiation. It also felt that all the 10 topics which had been discussed at the thirty-fourth session of the Scientific Committee would be very useful to all countries which, like his own, based their policy in that area on the exclusively peaceful use of nuclear energy. The Scientific Committee's high level of co-operation with the scientific organizations referred to in paragraph 6 of document A/40/417 was extremely beneficial, as was the continued support which the Scientific Committee received from UNEP.

18. In conclusion, he wished to stress the importance to the developing countries of promoting the peaceful uses of atomic energy and to express his hope that draft

(Mr. Laqorio, Argentina)

resolution A/SPC/40/L.2, which his country had sponsored, would be adopted by consensus.

19. Mr. FARTAS (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that his country attached great importance to the activities of the Scientific Committee because of the increasing importance of obtaining further data on doses, effects and risks from various sources of radiation.
20. His delegation hoped that the terms of reference of the Scientific Committee would be expanded to allow it to formulate both general and specific recommendations relating directly to measures to be taken at the national, regional and international levels to guard against the effects of atomic radiation.
21. There should be increased co-operation between the Scientific Committee, UNEP and the specialized agencies, particularly IAEA. The industrialized countries should provide the Scientific Committee with all the information available to them on the subject in the form of periodic reports in order to help it carry out its assigned task.
22. The questions studied by the Scientific Committee were of vital importance to all countries, particularly those exposed to the risks of radioactive contamination that did not have the necessary know-how to enable them to ward off the danger.
23. Science and technology were a basic tool for achieving economic development and for the advancement of medicine and education and his country therefore supported the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. However, it expressed its concern at reports that nuclear testing and the atomic radiation resulting therefrom might lead to serious contamination of the seas because of the spread of radioactive materials through the action of currents and the movement of contaminated fish into contiguous areas. The concern of his country was natural, since its Mediterranean coastline was more than 1,900 kilometres long and since the Mediterranean was its principal source of fish. It was because of that concern, among other reasons, that it persistently demanded the withdrawal of naval forces stationed in the Mediterranean, seeking to prevent pollution caused by military exercises, tests carried out by such forces or the dumping of wastes such as fuel oil.
24. His country was also concerned by reports referring to the possibility of leasing areas of the Sahara for the disposal of nuclear wastes. That concern was also natural, given that its Saharan borders were as long as its Mediterranean coastline and that the aquifers beneath the Sahara would shortly become its principal source of water. Just as it was totally opposed to nuclear explosions for military purposes, his country condemned the dumping of nuclear wastes at sea or in the deserts of developing countries which did not have the expertise to take the necessary precautions to protect their citizens from the long-term harmful effects of such wastes.
25. His country also opposed the nuclear arms race in outer space. Outer space should be used for peaceful purposes only and should not be transformed into an area of conflict.

(Mr. Fartas, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya)

26. The Director-General of the IAEA had, at the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly, referred to another possible source of radioactive contamination, namely attacks on nuclear installations using conventional weapons. That was cause for concern, since there were currently some 260 nuclear installations in the world.

27. There were those who enjoyed the benefits of membership in the United Nations while at the same time violating its principles and its Charter and who arrogated to themselves, whenever they so desired, a divine right to strike out in one direction or another on the pretext of exercising their right to self-defence. The unjustified surprise attack on the Iraqi nuclear installations might have had serious consequences had it not been for the preventive measures taken by the authorities concerned.

28. The international community must not, therefore, neglect such dangers, particularly in the drafting of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use of Nuclear Weapons. The Conference on Disarmament must take those matters into consideration since the threat of such attacks had not ceased and those responsible had stated that the scope for similar attacks might extend from Morocco to Pakistan.

29. Ms. MAUALA (Samoa) said that her country's firm support for the activities of the Scientific Committee was reflected again in its sponsorship of the draft resolution under consideration. Samoa strongly advocated the conclusion of the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty, which expressed the desire of the peoples of the region to live in an area free from nuclear explosive devices and their effects. In that connection, it was hoped that the Governments of France, the United Kingdom and the United States would consider in a positive manner the draft protocols to the Treaty so that its provisions would apply to the South Pacific Territories of those three countries.

30. She reiterated her Government's opposition to French nuclear tests in the South Pacific. In spite of the claims by the French Government that the tests were safe, there was no way of knowing their long-term effect on the environment. Furthermore, such tests were detrimental to the security interests of the region. Her Government condemned those tests and called upon France to cease them forthwith.

31. Mr. HARLAND (New Zealand) reaffirmed his country's support for the work of the Scientific Committee. His delegation was looking forward to the publication of the Scientific Committee's report on somatic and hereditary effects of ionizing radiation in 1986. The most recent data from the National Radiation Laboratory in New Zealand indicated a continuing drop in the level of radiation resulting from atmospheric nuclear testing. That clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of the partial Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty.

32. Although the scientific fact-finding mission which had visited France's nuclear-test-programme site at Mururoa Atoll had found no evidence of health hazards specifically attributable to the testing programme, it had found some evidence of damage to the structure of the coral limestone that formed the upper sections of the atoll. The possibility of eventual leakage from the detonation

(Mr. Harland, New Zealand)

chambers in the long-term could not be excluded. The mission's conclusions provided no basis for claims that the underground test programme was completely harmless and should be allowed to continue.

33. New Zealand's strong opposition to all nuclear tests was well known. A complete prohibition on the testing of nuclear weapons by all countries was a critical first step in halting the arms race. That view was shared by his country's neighbours in the region. At a recent meeting, the South Pacific Forum had reaffirmed its total opposition to French nuclear testing in the South Pacific and had urged France to halt immediately its nuclear testing programme at Mururoa Atoll. A prohibition of the use, testing or stationing of nuclear explosives in the South Pacific was essential in order to allay the fears of the countries in the region. To that end, the South Pacific Forum had endorsed the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty in August 1985. New Zealand, which was a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/40/L.2, would continue to support the work of the Scientific Committee.

34. Mr. KAZAKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) noted with satisfaction the fruitful co-operation of the Scientific Committee with UNEP and IAEA and expressed the hope that such co-operation would increase in the future. The general and complete prohibition of nuclear weapons and tests was essential in order to halt the arms race and bring about disarmament. The Soviet Union had put forward a number of concrete proposals for prohibiting nuclear-weapon tests. In order to overcome the deadlock in that regard, his Government was proposing the speedy drafting and conclusion of an international treaty on the general and complete prohibition of nuclear-weapon tests and was prepared to resume the trilateral negotiations between the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States.

35. The prohibition of all nuclear-weapon tests would be an important contribution to the task of promoting world peace. It was essential in order to limit the production of new types of nuclear bombs and warheads and strengthen measures to ensure the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union had repeatedly proposed that all nuclear-weapon States, as a gesture of good will, should declare a moratorium on nuclear explosions. His Government had taken that positive approach by declaring such a moratorium as of 6 August 1985.

36. Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons to outer space was crucially important in order to reduce the threat of a nuclear catastrophe. A programme to bring about the militarization of outer space in order to obtain a unilateral advantage posed a very grave danger for all mankind. The Soviet Union was firmly opposed to the spread of the arms race to outer space and advocated broad international co-operation in the peaceful use and exploration of outer space. The new Soviet proposals set forth a long-term programme combining the efforts of States to promote the peaceful use of outer space and the use of space technology to meet the economic and social needs of all peoples.

37. The Soviet Union was convinced that the Scientific Committee would continue to carry out successfully its important work. His delegation, which was a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/40/L.2, hoped that that draft resolution would be adopted without a vote.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.