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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 3rd MEETING

Chairman:

Mr. KARUKUBIRO-KAMUNANWIRE

(Uganda)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIRMAN

1. The CHAIRMAN said that, in accordance with the provisions of rule 103 of the rules of procedure, an election would be held by secret ballot, unless the Committee decided otherwise in cases where there was only one candidate. The nomination of each candidate would be limited to one speaker, after which the Committee would immediately proceed to the election.
2. Mr. ADNAN (Malaysia) nominated Mr. Arcilla (Philippines) for the office of Vice-Chairman.
3. The CHAIRMAN said that, there being no other candidate, he took it that the Committee decided to waive the requirement for a secret ballot.
4. It was so decided.
5. Mr. Arcilla (Philippines) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.
6. The CHAIRMAN reminded the Committee of the provisions of rule 110 of the rules of procedure, under which congratulations to the officers of a Main Committee were to be made only by the Chairman of the preceding session or by another member of his delegation after the members of the Bureau of the Committee had been elected.
7. Mr. BOUTS'KO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) observed that the item "Effects of atomic radiation" would be taken up at the current meeting. His delegation hoped that the Committee would consider that item and all the other items before it in a spirit of unity.
8. His delegation felt that the Chairman's role was not only to run the meetings according to schedule, but also to ensure that the meetings were fruitful.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK (A/SPC/45/1; A/SPC/45/L.1/Rev.1)

9. The CHAIRMAN recalled that, at its 2nd meeting, the Committee had decided to take a decision on the first item of its programme of work only, and to defer a decision on the remainder of the items to allow for further consultations.
10. In the revised timetable in document A/SPC/45/L.1/Rev.1, it was proposed that the Committee should commence its consideration of item 76, "Comprehensive review of the whole question of peace-keeping operations in all their aspects", on 20 November in the afternoon and continue its debate on 21, 23 and 28 November in the afternoon. It was further proposed that item 78, "Question of the composition of the relevant organs of the United Nations", should be taken up at the beginning of the meeting on 29 October before the Committee began its consideration of item 74, "United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East".

(The Chairman)

11. If there were no objections, he would take it that the Committee approved the revised programme of work set forth in document A/SPC/45/L.1/Rev.1.

12. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 72: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (A/45/319; A/SPC/45/L.2)

13. Ms. ZIKMUNDOVA (Belgium) said that, since its establishment in 1955, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had produced numerous reports and studies which had made considerable contributions to a scientific understanding of the effects of atomic radiation on the human body and the environment.

14. The Scientific Committee's research was particularly valuable to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), whose future activities would be aimed at achieving a better understanding of the levels, effects and dangers of atomic radiation from all sources.

15. On behalf of the sponsors, her delegation was introducing the draft resolution in document A/SPC/45/L.2, and hoped that the members of the Committee would adopt it by consensus.

16. Mr. TRAXLER (Italy), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that the Community was very pleased with the results achieved by the Scientific Committee and the fruitful co-operation carried out with other international bodies such as UNEP, FAO, WHO, IAEA, the International Commission on Radiological Protection and the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements.

17. The most recent report of the Scientific Committee (A/45/319) emphasized its constant efforts to base its work on all available information about sources of radiation, exposures and their effects. The distribution of a questionnaire on medical radiation usage to the Ministers of Health of all States Members of the United Nations would aid those efforts.

18. The report stated that, from the Committee's review of the various sources of radiation, natural sources appeared to be the main contributors to the collective dose. Although mankind could do little to control natural radiation, that conclusion should not diminish international efforts to prevent the negative effects of man-made sources of radiation. The European Community was involved in those efforts because of its specific responsibilities in the field of health protection under the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM) Treaty. The European Community and all its member States had recognized the need for international co-operation in that respect. All of the member States of the European Community had signed the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident, and the Community had decided to accede to it. The Community and its member States also recognized the need to consider further ways of enhancing international co-operation in the area of nuclear safety.

(Mr. Traxler, Italy)

19. The European Community applauded the commitment of the Scientific Committee to continue its research on the radiobiological effects of the Chernobyl accident, and hoped that a resolution would be adopted to renew the mandate of the Committee.

20. Mr. SATOH (Japan) said that the world was becoming increasingly dependent on nuclear power and related technologies, and that it was therefore imperative to guard against the potentially harmful or even deadly effects of atomic radiation. Just as the threat was global, so must the response be global. It was crucial for scientists throughout the world to co-operate in researching the effects of atomic radiation. The Scientific Committee was the ideal forum for such international co-operation.

21. His delegation considered that in dealing with the issue of atomic radiation the Scientific Committee would have to tackle a myriad of political, economic and social issues, and that if efforts to protect mankind and the environment were to be effective, they must be based on purely scientific and technical information.

22. As a member country of the Scientific Committee, Japan had, from the time of its establishment, attached great importance to its work and would continue to offer support and co-operation.

23. His delegation urged Member States, as well as the International Atomic Energy Agency, the specialized agencies and the various non-governmental organizations concerned, to co-operate vigorously with the Committee and provide it with all the information needed to ensure that its activities were as effective as possible.

24. Lastly, he expressed the hope that the Special Political Committee would adopt the draft resolution before it by consensus.

25. Mr. BOUTS'KO (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that his delegation had studied with considerable interest the report of the Scientific Committee, which contained information on the important work it had performed. Its co-operation with international organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was undoubtedly productive.

26. The material published by the Scientific Committee made it easier to understand the extraordinary dangers of atomic radiation and to decide what kind of protection was needed against it.

27. Such protection should involve, in the first place, the total elimination of nuclear weapons; and, secondly, the creation of conditions for regulating nuclear activities for peaceful purposes so that they would not endanger human lives.

28. The Scientific Committee in its report attached great importance to the medical and biological effects of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster. His delegation commended the member States of the Committee on their efforts to limit and overcome those effects.

(Mr. Bouts'ko, Ukrainian SSR)

29. The accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant had caused immense damage in the Ukrainian SSR and its effects had been felt in all spheres of the country's life. More than 1,800,000 persons, including 380,000 children, had suffered the direct effects of radiation.

30. Everything possible must be done to prevent such accidents. The Ukrainian SSR had made strenuous efforts to that end. However, comparing the adverse effects of the disaster with what had been achieved, it was clear that the action taken so far was only the beginning of a long struggle to overcome the consequences.

31. In the early stages of the disaster, it had been a matter of saving people exposed to direct radiation, but now there was the enormous task of planning protection for the whole population.

32. The strategy for the period until the year 2000 included a comprehensive programme for the eradication of the effects of the disaster, which had been approved by the Supreme Soviet of the Ukrainian SSR. The programme consisted of emergency measures for the period 1990-1992, using all the technical, scientific and economic resources of the Ukraine as well as all the resources of the Soviet Union.

33. The main objective was to create conditions for safeguarding the population living in the vicinity of nuclear power plants. Those areas covered 50,000 square kilometres, an area greater than the territory of 12 European countries. The Chernobyl disaster had thus given rise to a multitude of complex questions, for most of which there had as yet been no answer.

34. The Government of the Ukrainian SSR had not accepted the idea proposed by certain experts of 350 mSv in a life of 70 years. The idea of safety for the population in a contaminated zone must take account of sociological and psychological as well as medical and biological aspects.

35. Moreover, some of the population would have to be relocated; according to estimates by the Ukrainian Ministry of Health and the Academy of Sciences, 30,000 people in 67 population centres would have to be moved.

36. The programme provided for a radical improvement in medical care, with the establishment of clinics, monitoring of health, provision of all aspects of preventive care and the diagnosis and treatment of illnesses.

37. Measures had been taken to strengthen the health institutes. A broad network of diagnostic centres, laboratories and specialist clinics was being set up. The country's technical and scientific institutes were participating in that task.

38. It was important for the work of eradicating the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster to have a scientific basis. From the first few days following the disaster, scientists had been enlisted from all over the Republic. A set of information and diagnostic measures had been adopted for monitoring the atomic fuel in the destroyed reactor. Initially, not enough attention had been paid to certain

(Mr. Bouts'ko, Ukrainian SSR)

basic problems, and hence there was a lack of data for studying abnormal biological phenomena, especially in the areas in the vicinity of Chernobyl. Studies were currently being made of economic activity in the zones affected by radiation.

39. It was necessary to join forces, because the Chernobyl disaster was an international one. He thanked the many countries and governmental and non-governmental organizations which had co-operated with up-to-date measures in the relevant investigations. In April 1990 the Council of Ministers of the Ukrainian SSR had appealed to the international community for greater co-operation in overcoming the effects of the disaster. Since then, many offers of help had been received.

40. The Economic and Social Council at its second regular session in 1990, had adopted resolution 1990/50, on international co-operation to address and mitigate the consequences of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant; the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic placed great hopes on the implementation of that resolution.

41. In September 1990 an international conference on the radiological and biological aspects of the Chernobyl disaster had been held near Kiev with some 300 scientists from 22 countries participating. One of the results of the conference had been the recognition of the need to unite the efforts of scientists at world level. The Ukrainian SSR was pursuing and would continue to pursue an open-door policy, with no secrecy, and wished to co-operate with all specialists in the field.

42. He thanked all those who had co-operated with the Ukrainian SSR in dealing with the problems caused by the Chernobyl disaster, in particular, those who had helped in the rehabilitation of the children affected by the accident.

43. In appealing for assistance from the international community, the Ukrainian SSR was not proposing to solve its problems at the cost of the community, but to join in the general effort. The Government and the scientific and social organizations of the Ukrainian SSR wished to make a serious contribution to developing co-operation. It would like to see greater participation by UNEP, WHO, IAEA and other organizations in the proposed studies on the effects of the Chernobyl disaster. The Ukrainian SSR was one of the parties to an agreement on the establishment in Kiev of an international technical and scientific centre on Chernobyl and intended to assist work to that end by all possible means.

44. The CHAIRMAN said that Luxembourg had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.2.

45. Mr. BURAVKIN (Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic) said that never before in the 35 years since its establishment had the importance of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation been so widely recognized. The Committee was unique as a centre for the collection, study and dissemination of information on the hazards of atomic radiation for humanity and the environment. Its data had both scientific and political significance on a global scale. The

(Mr. Buravkin, Byelorussian SSR)

Byelorussian SSR shared the world-wide concern about the dangers of natural or man-made sources of radiation. The number of zones affected by artificial radiation sources had been increasing for some time. Since Hiroshima, the human environment had been experiencing a steady degradation due to artificially caused radiation. Both potential and existing radiation crises had to be prevented.

46. The Scientific Committee was in a position to make an important contribution to the preparations for the 1991 international conference on nuclear safety and the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Both sets of preparatory work could be considered by the Scientific Committee at its fortieth session. The Committee had the necessary experience to make a major contribution to the elaboration of principles aimed at preventing the degradation of the human environment due to radiation.

47. The environmental hazards of radiation were already a fact of life in the Byelorussian SSR because of the Chernobyl disaster, which had affected 33 per cent of the Republic's territory, 20 per cent of its population and 18 per cent of its most fertile soil. The Byelorussian SSR was therefore the State which had been the most severely affected by radiation in the history of mankind. Apart from the original affected areas, new areas of radioactive contamination had already been detected, creating a crisis situation. Thus, in accordance with the decision of the Supreme Soviet of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, his Government called upon the General Assembly to declare the territory of the Republic a disaster area.

48. Chernobyl had created a number of complex problems to which there were as yet no solutions. His delegation appreciated the scientific and technical contribution of the Scientific Committee, which had made the international community aware of the full scope of the harmful consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, for a truly global effort was needed to resolve those hitherto unknown problems.

49. Because of the previous policy of secrecy, the centralized monopoly on all issues having to do with atomic energy, and its limited national sovereignty, the Byelorussian SSR had been hindered in its efforts to provide the Scientific Committee with information, previously classified as confidential on the Chernobyl accident. That information had since been declassified and was no longer confidential.

50. In general, the Scientific Committee had played a major role. The importance of its contributions could be seen in the report of the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council at its second regular session of 1990 (E/1990/97), which was a useful document. His delegation wished in particular to highlight the Committee's participation in the work of the Inter-Agency Committee for the Response to Nuclear Accidents, its co-operation with UNEP and IAEA, and its participation in an international expert study of the radiation effects of the Chernobyl disaster on the most highly contaminated territories, undertaken at the request of the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The Byelorussian SSR suggested that consideration be given to increasing the maximum membership of the Scientific Committee.

(Mr. Buraykin, Byelorussian SSR)

51. The official estimates regarding the health of individuals affected by the Chernobyl disaster had not turned out to be accurate. Consequently, his Government had abandoned the concepts of 700 mSv and 300 mSv and had had to draw up its own long-term programme, with due regard for world opinion, including the less optimistic forecasts.

52. The collection and study of data on levels of radiation and radioactivity recorded in the environment and their effects on human beings was being carried out at the national radiation control system and in some 40 scientific, health-care and agricultural research centres.

53. The Government of the Byelorussian SSR had been given special powers to speed up the resettlement of people living in zones with a high level of radioactive contamination and urgently needed a national radiation service to monitor contamination levels in food. In spite of the many efforts being carried out in the Byelorussian SSR, without international co-operation or safeguards, positive results could not be expected. His Government shared the Scientific Committee's concern that, more than four and a half years after the Chernobyl disaster, all the efforts needed to resolve the problems had not yet been made. For that reason, the Byelorussian SSR was looking forward to participating in the work of the Chernobyl Scientific Centre and of an international medical radiation centre in the USSR, in co-operation with IAEA and WHO. His Government was also proposing the establishment in the Byelorussian SSR, and with the participation of UNEP, UNESCO and other international organizations, of an international centre for research on the environmental, radioactive and biological effects of nuclear energy.

54. Mr. ZAWELS (Argentina) said that the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/45/319) demonstrated the extensive work of the Committee, the wide range of themes that it had chosen for consideration, and a more in-depth analysis of the effects of radiation exposure. His country wished to stress the co-operation requested by the Scientific Committee from the Health Ministries of the Member States. Also worthy of attention was the Scientific Committee's conclusion that natural sources of radiation had been the main contributor to the collective dose.

55. He wished to emphasize the importance of the relationship between the effects of atomic radiation and the study of the environment and, in particular, the magnitude of the effects of atomic radiation on human beings. Argentina agreed that the Committee should do further and more extensive study on that relationship. It also shared the Committee's hope that the States Members, the specialized agencies and IAEA would continue to assist in its work.

56. In recent months, the international community had witnessed and had created important changes in the relations between nations. However, the Gulf crisis had been one recent negative event in that sphere. The crisis had demonstrated that the lessons of the not-so-distant past, namely, the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, had not been fully appreciated. Once again, the world was critically dependent on fossil fuels, showing how important it was to continue actively the search for

(Mr. Zawels, Argentina)

alternative sources of energy. Among them, one of the most outstanding was nuclear fission energy.

57. Within that framework, Argentina was beginning to use atomic energy for peaceful purposes. The goal of his country's nuclear programme was the social and economic development of society and its peaceful purposes were clear. The recent regional agreements, in particular, the co-operation agreement with Brazil in that area, were unmistakable indications of the peaceful objectives of Argentina's nuclear programme.

58. Argentina had therefore a special interest in the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, in which it had participated since the establishment of the Committee. Argentina's National Atomic Energy Commission provided important information to the Scientific Committee for use in its reports and those data represented a useful source of information.

59. Argentina wished to join the list of sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.2, which it hoped would be adopted by consensus.

60. Mr. JANOWSKI (Poland) said that the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which 35 years ago had been given a mandate to study the risks and effects of ionizing radiation, had fulfilled its responsibilities in a remarkable way. Those achievements had been realized under financial and organizational conditions which were not very favourable to efficient work.

61. Referring to a theory held by some scientists to the effect that small doses of atomic radiation had a beneficial effect on human beings, comparable to the homeopathic effect of certain harmful substances taken in small doses, he did not think that the Scientific Committee should devote much time to the question of such potentially beneficial effects. More emphasis should be placed on the effects of a nuclear catastrophe caused by the breakdown of a reactor and, in general, on the harmful effects of atomic radiation as opposed to any potentially beneficial effects.

62. In the conclusions of the Scientific Committee, it was suggested, if not stated in so many words, that radiation had no direct genetic impact on human beings, an idea that would be contrary to all thinking on the subject to date and might change the general public's perception of nuclear power.

63. The Scientific Committee had been praised for its co-operation with bodies like IAEA, WHO and UNEP, but consideration should be given, in particular, to increased co-operation with IAEA.

64. In conclusion, he pledged the Polish delegation's support for the Scientific Committee's work in the years ahead.

65. Mr. LIU Zhaodong (China) said that the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had done useful work over the years. It had reached authoritative conclusions on the effects of atomic radiation which could serve as the basis for the correct use of atomic radiation and the protection of mankind against its harmful effects. The Scientific Committee had also promoted co-operation between countries and helped to set up development of identical standards.

66. China had adopted a policy of peaceful utilization of nuclear energy as part of its national economic development and therefore attached great importance to the work of the United Nations and its specialized agencies in the protection of human health against the harmful effects of atomic radiation.

67. At the thirty-fifth session of the Scientific Committee, the Chinese delegation had promised to provide information for the updating of the Committee's scientific report. He also reiterated a proposal made at the forty-fourth session of the General Assembly to the effect that the Scientific Committee should disseminate information promptly, especially among developing countries.

68. In conclusion, the Chinese delegation supported the draft resolution (A/SPC/45/L.2).

69. Mr. SMIRNOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had enough experience and knowledge to contribute to the prevention of possible sources of radioactive contamination and the elimination of existing sources. He referred in that connection to the useful work accomplished in connection with the accident that had occurred at the Chernobyl nuclear power station.

70. At its second regular session in 1990, the Economic and Social Council, in resolution 1990/50, had requested the Secretary-General to provide appropriate support for the international assessment of the consequences of the Chernobyl accident. That assessment had been organized by IAEA with the participation of various other bodies, including the Scientific Committee.

71. The fact had to be faced that the situation regarding Chernobyl, to which the representatives of the Byelorussian SSR and the Ukrainian SSR had referred, continued to be extremely serious. Both the Government of the Soviet Union and the social organizations concerned attached great importance to the implementation of a programme to eliminate the consequences of the accident, but they had been so great that it would be most unrealistic for the Soviet Union to expect to be able to tackle them with its own resources, which was why the Soviet Union was highly appreciative of the assistance given by international organizations, States and individuals.

72. The Chernobyl accident had thrown into relief the dangers of atomic radiation and had served to reassert the need for nuclear disarmament. The data collected by the Scientific Committee for its reports helped to ensure wide recognition of the dangers of radioactive contamination and the need to prevent it, first and foremost by discontinuing nuclear-weapon tests.

(Mr. Smirnov, USSR)

73. The Supreme Soviet of the USSR had recently ratified the Treaty on the Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapon Tests and the Treaty on Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes, and had addressed an appeal to the parliaments of the world stressing the urgent need to put an end as soon as possible to all nuclear-weapons tests as an important factor conducive to the consolidation of the system of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and their elimination.

74. With regard to the discontinuance of nuclear-weapon tests, the Soviet Union had taken initiatives that were well known; however, the problem was one that called for joint efforts by the international community as a whole.

75. The Soviet delegation believed that the time had come for all bodies in the United Nations system, with a view to the peaceful use of advances in science and technology for the benefit of all States, to take part in the preparation of a universal treaty on the discontinuance and prohibition of nuclear tests, and he was sure that the Scientific Committee would make its contribution to that work.

76. In conclusion, he expressed the hope that draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.2 on the effects of atomic radiation and the work of the Scientific Committee would be adopted by consensus.

77. Mr. POSSO SERRANO (Ecuador) stressed the importance of the Scientific Committee's work for a more comprehensive understanding of acceptable levels and effects of atomic radiation. Naturally, there must be close co-operation between the Scientific Committee and UNEP, so as to meet the needs of mankind with regard to protecting the environment, preventing accidents like the one to which reference had been made and putting an end to irresponsible nuclear-weapons tests.

78. Bearing in mind the persistent or periodic world energy crises, as the representative of Argentina had pointed out, nuclear energy had become extremely important. Ecuador naturally advocated the use of nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes.

79. Ecuador wished to see the Scientific Committee continuing with its work as a guarantee of the safety of mankind, through its periodic reports on doses, effects and risks of atomic radiation; for that reason, the Ecuadorian delegation supported draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.2.

80. The delegation of Ecuador reserved the right to return to the topic if the question arose of increasing the membership of the Scientific Committee. Although it considered that the Scientific Committee had worked efficiently with its present membership, an increase might more fully reflect the universal interest in the problems of atomic radiation and the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

81. The CHAIRMAN announced that at the next meeting the general debate on item 72 would be concluded and a decision reached on draft resolution A/SPC/45/L.2.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.