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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 5th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUBAREZ (Yemen)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.20 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 60: EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION: REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued) (A/37/45; A/SPC/37/L.3)

1. Mr. CANALES (Chile) said that his country attached particular importance to the study of the effects of atomic radiation in view of the potentially harmful consequences for human life and the environment resulting from the indiscriminate use of nuclear energy. For that reason, Chile had always fully supported the work of the Scientific Committee. His Government favoured the adoption as soon as possible of an international agreement to halt all nuclear arms tests by all States within the framework of general nuclear disarmament. Like many other delegations, his delegation was alarmed at the proliferation of nuclear explosions carried out in the atmosphere, in outer space, under water and beneath the earth's surface. His Government was also concerned at the use of nuclear energy sources in outer space, because of the potential harm for mankind and the environment caused by the re-entry of such devices into the earth's atmosphere. Chile, therefore, supported the adoption of new legal norms in space law along the lines of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, and the Convention on International Liability for Damage Caused by Space Objects. In that regard, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space should take decisive steps towards the adoption of clear and specific norms in that field. Lastly, he reiterated his Government's support for the creation and maintenance of denuclearized zones in all regions of the world, the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency, particularly its supervisory functions, and the halting of all types of nuclear tests.

2. Mr. NOORANI (Pakistan) said that the Scientific Committee had done a laudable job in trying to evolve a system of international co-operation to enhance awareness of the hazards resulting from atomic and ionizing radiation. His delegation had noted that a revision had been proposed to the dosimetric estimates for the surveys of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That was an important aspect of the studies of the Scientific Committee. Its studies had confirmed that the major contribution to the annual level of dosage received by mankind came from natural radiation sources. Nevertheless, not many people were aware of the fact that exposure rates indoors were, on the average, 20 per cent higher than those outdoors. His delegation felt that people all over the world should be informed in that regard. Although nuclear tests had not significantly contributed to contamination of the environment, radiation from that source could be reduced, if not completely eliminated. In that regard, he stressed the need to intensify efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament as part of the ultimate goal of general and complete disarmament.

3. It was encouraging to note that it was possible to reduce medical exposure to radiation doses, which was the largest man-made contribution to radiation doses received by the population. He expressed satisfaction at the efforts of the Scientific Committee to survey the state of diagnostic radiology in developing

(Mr. Noorani, Pakistan)

countries. Consideration should be given to the question whether manufacturers of radiation-emitting consumer goods and industrial equipment should label their products as radiation-emitting. The task of the Scientific Committee was so vital that it should be allowed to continue its work in exploring the possibilities of reducing the risks to mankind from atomic radiation. His delegation, therefore, wholeheartedly supported draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3.

4. Mrs. NOWOTNY (Austria) said that her delegation had noted with interest the conclusion in the report of the Scientific Committee that radiation exposure through environmental contamination caused by past atmospheric or surface testing of nuclear weapons continued to decrease. It was also interesting to learn that the collective dose commitment arising from environmental contamination due to reactor operation provided a relatively minor contribution to the total radiological impact of the nuclear fuel cycle. Nevertheless, with the increase of installed nuclear capacity, the dose commitment from nuclear power was expected to increase. Her delegation would closely follow the future work of the Scientific Committee and welcomed the decision of IAEA, ILO, WHO and the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development jointly to provide standards for radiation protection on a world-wide basis. It was also gratifying to see that the radiation effects on genetic material and the assessment of the risk of radiation continued to appear on the agenda of the Scientific Committee.

5. Her Government highly appreciated the work done by the Scientific Committee and looked forward to its future reports to the General Assembly. Furthermore, it was highly gratifying to note that the close co-operation between the Scientific Committee and UNEP and IAEA had expanded over the past year. That again underscored the important role of the United Nations as a focal point for the investigation and solution of problems affecting the entire world. Lastly, her delegation was pleased to be a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3.

6. Mr. KULAWIEC (Czechoslovakia) said that one of the many important aspects of the report of the Scientific Committee was the objective scientific evaluation of the radiation risks caused by the production of nuclear energy. In view of the fact that the General Assembly had requested WHO to draft a document on the risks of nuclear war to human health, his delegation felt that the Scientific Committee could make a valuable contribution to that effort because of its experience in that field.

7. The report of the Scientific Committee demonstrated that the Partial Test Ban Treaty signed at Moscow in 1963 had played an important role in reducing radioactive fall-out on the earth's surface. All States which had not yet done so should accede to that Treaty. It was also essential to achieve a ban on all nuclear weapon tests, including underground testing. His delegation, therefore, fully supported the constructive Soviet proposal in that regard submitted at the current session of the General Assembly.

8. The Scientific Committee had made an important contribution to the information available to the General Assembly on such important questions as the level of

(Mr. Kulawiec, Czechoslovakia)

ionizing radiation and the risks arising from radiation sources. The importance of the activities of the Scientific Committee was further enhanced by the fact that it evaluated the risks from all types of radiation. His delegation did not feel that the Scientific Committee should have to evaluate radiation from nuclear-weapon tests because that would be unnecessary if the proposals for halting nuclear-weapon tests were adopted. The Scientific Committee could then devote more of its work to the questions relating to the protection of human health in beneficial productive activities. In view of those considerations, his delegation had joined the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3.

9. Mr. JAMES (Australia) expressed satisfaction at the comprehensive and informative report submitted by the Scientific Committee. The practice of expressing radiation exposure in terms of effective dose equivalent and expressing effective dose in terms of equivalent time of exposure to natural background was particularly helpful for the non-specialist. He stressed the importance of the conclusions in the report about the dominant contribution of radon and its daughters as a source of natural radiation to which the world population, especially in cold climates, was exposed. Those findings highlighted the importance of the Scientific Committee and the need to ensure that its excellent technical work continued unimpeded by political or other extraneous considerations. He drew attention to the concern of South Pacific countries over the continued threat posed to that region by nuclear-weapon testing and proposals to dump nuclear wastes in the area. He recalled that the Heads of Government of the States members of the South Pacific Forum, on 11 August 1982, had strongly condemned continued nuclear-weapon testing in the South Pacific and the failure to provide full details of the effects of past testing activities on the peoples and the environment of the area and had expressed their determination to prevent further exploitation of the Pacific for nuclear purposes in ways which were detrimental to the interests of South Pacific States and the environment of the region. His delegation expressed the hope that the Scientific Committee would take those concerns into account in the course of its work. Lastly, his delegation was pleased to join the sponsors of draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3 and hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

10. Mr. PORTUGAL (Peru) expressed satisfaction at the comprehensive and informative report submitted by the Scientific Committee. It was important that all Governments should take due note of the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report. His delegation supported draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3 and wished to become a sponsor thereof. He hoped that that draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

11. Mr. SUAREZ (Philippines) said that the report of the Scientific Committee was a timely and important contribution to studies dealing with the quality of the global environment and the future of human life on earth. From the report it was clear that nuclear-weapon tests in the atmosphere had caused widespread contamination in the environment. No nation, whether great or small, had the inherent right to pollute the global environment and jeopardize the future of mankind in the misconceived pursuit of its national interest. The fact that the

(Mr. Suarez, Philippines)

Partial Test Ban Treaty had not been ratified by all States was a cause of great concern for his delegation. Halting the nuclear arms race was essential to the survival of mankind. Universal agreement on a comprehensive test ban on nuclear weapons could be a first step in that direction. To that end, the Scientific Committee might also find it necessary to examine the effects of nuclear explosions in outer space. His Government was concerned at proposed plans to dispose of low-level radioactive waste in the Pacific Ocean near the Philippines and felt that the Scientific Committee should consider the implications of such disposal programmes in terms of their effects on the marine life and environment of that area. Lastly, his delegation would be pleased to support draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3.

12. Mr. KHAN (India) commended the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation for fulfilling its mandate with scientific authority and independence, thereby contributing to a broader knowledge and understanding of the levels, effects and risks of atomic radiation. He was also happy to note that the Scientific Committee was satisfied with the information supplied to it by, inter alia, Member States, the specialized agencies and IAEA.

13. The harmful effects of atomic radiation in cases of over-exposure were well known. Many of their consequences were of long-term gestation, passed on from generation to generation. Man had enough pathogenic enemies; must he create more or add to the toxicity that threatened life on earth? Scientific understanding of the effects of radiation was absolutely essential in harnessing the energy of the atom if man was to protect himself and other biological and plant life from sometimes unintended but irreparable damage. His Government would therefore continue to support the excellent work of the Scientific Committee and wished to co-sponsor draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3.

14. Mr. CARAZO (Venezuela) welcomed the latest report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/37/45), the fruit of many years' work which, he was sure, contained elements that would be of great value in guiding countries in their policies on protection against ionizing radiation.

15. Venezuela's National Council for the Development of Nuclear Energy (CONADIN) would be making its views known on the substance of the report. One of CONADIN's current tasks was to draw up and maintain a register of sources of ionizing radiation in Venezuela and all individuals or legal entities that used such sources would be obliged to report to it. The register was intended to minimize the risks arising from peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to restrict the use of nuclear energy sources to properly trained personnel. Control would also be maintained over nuclear waste, which would be sent to appropriate "burial grounds" which did not threaten human safety or the environment. Finally, a census would be made of persons exposed to ionizing radiation in the work-place.

16. It did not take a nuclear confrontation between the nuclear Powers for human beings and the environment to have to suffer the appalling consequences of the

(Mr. Carazo, Venezuela)

misuse of nuclear energy. Nuclear energy involved risks even when it was used for civilian purposes to promote man's well-being and development, especially in the developing countries which had still to adopt appropriate protective measures. The arms race and the possibility of a nuclear war were, none the less, one of the greatest threats to mankind and his delegation reiterated its view that immediate agreement must be reached on the total banning of nuclear-weapon tests.

17. His delegation supported draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3 and hoped that it would be adopted by consensus.

18. Mr. REMEDI (Uruguay) said that his delegation was convinced of the need to take every possible step to prevent the consequences of exposure to atomic radiation. The various reports of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, particularly that contained in document A/37/45, contributed to the adoption of measures to limit the harmful effects of such radiation.

19. While the Scientific Committee's latest report indicated that the average annual dose of radiation to which mankind was exposed came principally from natural radiation sources, his delegation was seriously concerned at the emerging effects of radiation emanating from artificial radiation sources, particularly those deriving from nuclear explosions and the production of nuclear power. It therefore welcomed the fact that the Scientific Committee had continued to assess the radiation to which the world population had been exposed as a result of nuclear explosions and urged it to continue its research in that area, even though nuclear-weapon testing in the atmosphere had diminished.

20. In view of the serious consequences of exposure to radiation for mankind and the effects of such radiation on human genes and chromosomes, preventive measures must conform strictly not only to present conceptions based on positive knowledge of the effects of radiation but also to a policy of prudence and restraint in areas where the effects of radiation were not yet precisely known.

21. The value of the work done by the Scientific Committee lay in the fact that it had not only contributed to knowledge of the effects of atomic radiation but, in disseminating technical or scientific information, had also issued an objective warning as to the risks of exposure to radiation and generated the necessary confidence in those countries which, like Uruguay, were devoting particular attention to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. His delegation believed that the time had now come to expand the Scientific Committee's original mandate and to investigate ways of empowering it to formulate general and specific recommendations on measures to prevent or mitigate the effects of atomic radiation. The Scientific Committee's competence and high scientific level placed it in an excellent position to make such recommendations, and he hoped that, at the thirty-eighth session of the General Assembly, ways of assigning the Scientific Committee such powers might be discussed. In the meantime, his delegation supported the continuation of the Special Committee's work and was intensifying its co-operation with UNEP and IAEA.

(Mr. Remedi, Uruguay)

Such co-operation was further proof of the important co-ordinating role played by the United Nations in resolving problems of global impact.

22. His delegation wished to co-sponsor the draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3.

23. Mr. LENNUYEUX-COMNENE (France) said that the latest report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation should, with its annexes, be given the broadest possible distribution. The report gave a clear picture of the real dangers which the development of modern technology and therapeutic techniques presented for mankind, tackling a number of prevailing ideas as to the relative importance of the main sources of radiation. That had not, however, prevented several delegations from using the report as a vehicle for their propaganda on certain proposals relating to disarmament, which were being considered in other organs of the Assembly.

24. The French Government would continue to co-operate with the Scientific Committee not only by sending a team of highly qualified experts to all of its meetings but also by providing it each year with atomic radiation data collected throughout the territories under French sovereignty.

25. His delegation wished to co-sponsor draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3.

26. Mr. OMARDIN (Malaysia) commended the latest report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which provided a valuable overview of developments since 1977. It was clear from the Scientific Committee's conclusions that the effects of atomic radiation had a very significant impact on man and his environment owing to the increase in exposure to radiation. The Committee's findings must, therefore, be disseminated widely, so that the public gained a greater awareness of the harmful effects of radiation and the disposal of nuclear waste on man and his environment. The Scientific Committee should now pursue its work, with the assistance of UNEP and other specialized agencies, in order to cover those areas not dealt with in its latest report.

27. Mr. EDEY (Barbados) observed from the report of the Scientific Committee that, since natural sources of atomic radiation were the main contributors to exposure to radiation, it was clear that human contact with radiation was inevitable. All too often, however, the healthful balance had been disturbed, and the report showed that nuclear explosions were the greatest offenders in unbalancing a healthy human environment. It was deeply disturbing to consider that the adverse genetic, biological and physical effects of nuclear explosions would be felt not only by present generations but also by innocent future generations. All nations without distinction were affected by nuclear fall-out and it was calculated that people would be suffering from its impact for thousands of years to come. Countries had a responsibility to deliver a better environment to posterity, and his delegation called upon all the nuclear Powers to work towards that end. Co-operation and understanding must replace nuclear explosions.

28. His delegation commended the work represented by the Scientific Committee's latest report, which would be of interest to both medical authorities and

(Mr. Edey, Barbados)

scientific researchers in Barbados. The report showed that there were still considerable gaps in man's knowledge of the subject, and it was to be hoped that continued research in that field would go some way towards making the nuclear Powers more cautious and considerate in their use of their nuclear technology. He hoped also that those responsible for man-made sources of radiation would develop the necessary protective equipment to prevent or minimize the incidence of human over-exposure.

29. The report of the Scientific Committee should also be linked to agenda item 42 concerning the cessation of all test explosions of nuclear weapons. There was room for collaboration between the Special Political Committee and the First Committee on that matter.

30. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Committee should now consider draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3. The following countries wished to become sponsors of the draft resolution: Chile, Denmark, Malaysia, Netherlands and Peru.

31. Mr. KUBBA (Iraq), speaking in explanation of vote, said that his delegation was prepared to join in a consensus on the draft resolution, although it would have preferred to see reflected in the resolution the concerns expressed in the Committee regarding military attacks on nuclear facilities. Many delegations shared his delegation's views in that regard.

32. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

33. Draft resolution A/SPC/37/L.3 was adopted without a vote.

34. The CHAIRMAN announced that the Committee had concluded its consideration of item 60.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.