

UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



LIMITED
A/C.1/PV.898
11 November 1957
ENGLISH

Twelfth Session
FIRST COMMITTEE

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND NINETY-EIGHTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 11 November 1957, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman:

Mr. ABDOL

(Iran)

Effects of atomic radiation [57] (continued)

Note: The Official Record of this meeting, i.e., the summary record, will appear in mimeographed form under the symbol A/C.1/SR.898. Delegations may submit corrections to the summary record for incorporation in the final version which will appear in a printed volume.

AGENDA ITEM 57

EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (continued)

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from French): Today, the Committee will consider the draft resolutions and amendments which have been submitted on this item.

I have, however, just been told that, as the result of consultations between the sponsors of the draft resolutions and amendments and representatives who have taken an active part in the debate, another draft resolution may be presented to the Committee. I therefore propose to suspend this meeting until 11.15 a.m., in order to allow time for a new draft resolution to be drawn up, and to permit the Secretariat to reproduce and distribute such a draft resolution to the members of the Committee.

Since there are no objections, this meeting is suspended until 11.15 a.m.

The meeting was suspended at 10.55 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from French): We will now continue the consideration of the draft resolution and the amendments to them.

Before calling on one of the sponsors of the joint draft resolution, I should like to tell you that following on the consultations that took place between the sponsors of the different resolutions and amendments, as well as with those who took part in the debate, it appears that they have arrived at a point where a draft resolution will be presented which might be adopted unanimously by the Committee. This draft resolution is contained in document A/C.1/L.189.

In order to facilitate the course of our debate, I propose the following procedure. First of all, I will call on the sponsors of the resolution and the amendments; that is to say, I shall first call on the representative of the United States of America, then the representative of Czechoslovakia and then the representative of Japan. I shall then put to the vote the draft resolution. If there are no objections, then I shall put to the vote the draft resolution that the Committee has just had distributed to it. Naturally those who may wish to participate may do so in the form of an explanation of votes once the vote has been taken. If there are no objections, that is the procedure I propose to follow.

It was so decided.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from French): First of all, therefore, I call on the representative of the United States.

Mr. WADSWORTH (United States of America): Together with the other co-sponsors of our original draft resolution, we wish to express our appreciation to all those delegations which have worked so hard in attempting to find an acceptable answer to this problem which has been before us.

I would not wish to introduce this draft resolution formally because I believe that the task of doing that should be given to the representative of India who is one of the major architects of the language as we find it in document A/C.1/L.189.

(Mr. Wadsworth, United States)

I do wish, however, to say briefly, first, that the original eight co-sponsors will not press for a vote upon their draft resolution. The United States has not only co-sponsored, but also it will support this new draft resolution, and I understand that all the other co-sponsors are also on this new draft resolution and are ready to support it. In our opinion, this question of arriving at an acceptable solution is in full keeping with the tradition of this body which has from the first found it possible to agree unanimously on matters having to do with this most important subject of radiation. We are glad that this apparently will be the case again. I should also like to say that we will not, as far as the United States delegation is concerned, reply to any of the statements which have been made during the debate since I last intervened, even though the tone and content of some of the interventions made are scarcely to be applauded as far as my delegation is concerned. Not only has the tone been slightly off in impugning the motives of my delegation and my country, but also a good deal of the scientific data produced has in our opinion been incorrect. Be that as it may, in the spirit of accommodation and of the feeling which I am sure prevails throughout this chamber, I will merely close by saying that this draft resolution will show, as far as we are concerned, that we are doing everything possible to express our continued interest and concern on the matter of radiation and to strengthen the hands of the many scientists who under our auspices are extending the frontiers of knowledge in this highly technical field. The United States is glad to support this new draft resolution.

Mr. DAVID (Czechoslovakia) (interpretation from Russian): In connexion with the consideration of the draft resolution before us, I should like to emphasize once again that the draft resolution moved by the Czechoslovak Republic in document A/C.1/L.183 is designed further to develop and intensify United Nations activity in studying the harmful effects of atomic radiation.

The course of the General Assembly's debate has shown that basically this thought commands broad support. There are variations, however, as to the nature of the measures to be taken by the General Assembly at this juncture. In the opinion of the Czechoslovak delegation -- and in the opinion of many other delegations as well, as the debate has shown -- the danger which faces mankind today as a result of the steadily increasing level of radioactivity as a result of test

(Mr. David, Czechoslovakia)

explosions of atomic weapons is an immediate one. These are dangerous for the present and future generations which must indeed be studied carefully. Intensive scientific research and investigations on a broad basis are therefore necessary.

United Nations activity can assist in calling a world conference on atomic radiation so as to give all scientists an opportunity to express themselves on this subject in a broad international forum inasmuch as such a conference, which would supplement the work of the Scientific Committee, should indeed be prepared carefully. The decision for the convening of the conference ought to be taken at the present session of the General Assembly. In the course of the debate, however, a number of delegations expressed the view that the question of the convening of the scientific conference should be commented upon by the Scientific Committee. These delegations stated that the Scientific Committee ought to examine all proposals and views expressed in the course of the debate on the effects of atomic radiation and should express its opinion in the report which the Scientific Committee is to submit to the thirteenth session of the General Assembly.

(Mr. David, Czechoslovakia)

Several delegations proposed that the comments and views expressed in the course of the debate should, so far as possible, be combined and that a unanimous decision should be taken. The draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/L.189, which was presented today by the delegation of India and some others, is designed to meet the various views on recommendations mentioned here. Paragraph 3 of the operative part of this draft resolution says:

"Requests the Secretary-General in consultation with the Scientific Committee to consider the question of the strengthening and widening of scientific activities in this field" -- this field being the study of atomic radiation -- "taking into account in this connexion the discussion of this item at the twelfth session of the Assembly including the proposals submitted thereunder..."

This means that the draft resolution (A/C.1/L.183) presented by the Czechoslovak delegation will likewise be taken into consideration by the Secretary-General and the Scientific Committee. The Secretary-General's report will in due course come before the thirteenth session of the General Assembly.

Under the circumstances, and in the interests of achieving agreement on this important question, the Czechoslovak delegation will vote in favour of this new draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/L.189. If the draft resolution is adopted, the Czechoslovak delegation will not press for a vote on its own draft resolution.

We proceed from the conviction that the Scientific Committee and the Secretary-General will take a favourable view of our proposal for the convening of a world conference on the effects of atomic radiation and that at the thirteenth session of the General Assembly a decision for the convening of such a conference can in fact be adopted.

Mr. HAGIWARA (Japan) (interpretation from French): In the course of the general debate over the last few days, many things have been said on the importance of the question under consideration, but quite a few things were likewise said to envenom the debate and to leave an aftertaste of bitterness in one's mouth. I am happy that a new draft resolution has now been placed before us, one which may, we hope, be adopted unanimously. We all know that we owe this draft resolution to the ingenuity of the representative of India.

(Mr. Hagiwara, Japan)

I note that almost all members of the Scientific Committee -- all but two, I believe -- are among the co-sponsors of the new draft resolution. During my preceding statement on Friday, I ventured a suggestion designed to strengthen the functions of the Scientific Committee. With the exception of very few colleagues, like Professor Hercik of Czechoslovakia, we are laymen, but we are asking the scientists to collect and evaluate scientific information and draw objective conclusions therefrom. This being so, we should give them the time, the means and the facilities.

This idea of strengthening the Scientific Committee was presented by me in the form of an amendment to the eight-Power draft resolution. Clearly, this amendment will not be put to the vote inasmuch as the original eight-Power proposal which we wanted to amend will not be put to the vote either. I am happy to note, however, that our idea that the Scientific Committee should be strengthened has now been incorporated in the final text in paragraph 3 of the operative part.

May I say just a word on the position of my delegation as regards the idea of a world scientific conference. During the general debate -- wrongly, as I think, or rightly, as others thought -- ulterior motives of political reasons were attributed to this idea of an international conference. The misunderstanding was almost inevitable since the proposal was directly introduced in the Political Committee of the General Assembly. But if this idea had originated from the Scientific Committee itself, in which all of us have full confidence, and if the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Scientific Committee, were to propose to us at the thirteenth session of the General Assembly, that seminars, symposia or scientific conferences should in fact be organized, we would surely be more sympathetically inclined towards this idea and towards following it up.

To revert to our amendments (A/C.1/L.168), the first part was designed to indicate the various categories of information which the parties concerned were to be called upon to make available to the Scientific Committee. We wanted to add to paragraph 1 of the operative part the following expressions: special

(Mr. Hagiwara, Japan)

information on levels of natural background radiation, exposures from industrial uses of radiation, and contamination of the environment by man-made radioactivity, including nuclear test explosions and radioactive waste from industries.

We feel that this is the type of information which the Scientific Committee needs. We should ask all concerned, especially the great Powers, to make such information available to the Scientific Committee. However, in order to simplify the text, my delegation did not press for the inclusion of this wording in the final text.

(Mr. Hagiwara, Japan)

We do know that the text of our amendment will be referred to the Scientific Committee for its consideration, along with all the other proposals and amendments. The Scientific Committee will be free to specify the nature of the information which it particularly needs in order to complete its task. It will then be able to take into consideration the suggestions in our list. That is why we do not press for a vote on our amendment.

Mr. LALL (India): Evidence of the widespread interest in the item now before the Committee, on the effects of atomic radiation, is to be found first in the comprehensiveness of the debate which has taken place and secondly in the very considerable number of proposals which have been submitted. At the outset there was the draft resolution of the delegation of Czechoslovakia. That was followed by the draft resolution sponsored by eight countries, which has today been revised to include Mexico among the sponsors. Then, there were the interesting amendments introduced by the delegation of Japan.

It was clear, both from the speeches of the various representatives who participated in the debate on the item and from the proposals submitted, that the thinking in the matter was moving in the same general direction -- that is, the direction of increased study of and attention to this very important question.

Indeed, since the sponsors of the original draft resolutions and amendments have agreed that those proposals should not be put to the vote, the Committee has, I think, by a natural process of evolution come to the point where it has before it only one draft resolution -- namely, the draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/L.189. This draft resolution is sponsored by the fifteen countries whose names appear at the head of document A/C.1/L.189 and by Austria. The sponsors are happy to have Austria included among their number, because of Austria's interest in this problem as a Government and as a country and because Vienna is now the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency. We would therefore ask that Austria's name should be included among the list of sponsors of this draft resolution.

(Mr. Lall, India)

The sense of the draft resolution is quite clear from its language. As I have already said, the main emphasis in this debate and in the proposals has been on intensifying the study of this subject. In order that progress might be made, therefore, the draft resolution quite rightly asks the Scientific Committee -- which, as we know, was requested to let us have its report by 1 July 1958 -- to prepare its report at the earliest possible date. Paragraph 3 of the operative part of the draft resolution sums up the concept of increased study by referring to the strengthening and widening of scientific activities in this field. Taking that question into account, the draft resolution requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Scientific Committee, to go into the matter and to bear in mind the discussion of this item at the current session of the Assembly, as well as the proposals made to the First Committee. In that sense, the proposals in the draft resolutions and amendments which are not being pressed to a vote here will be before us through the report of the Secretary-General, when we consider the matter again at the Assembly's thirteenth session. That, briefly, is the sense of the draft resolution.

It is unnecessary to say anything more except that the delegation of India hopes that the vote on this draft resolution will be unanimous so that the work may go forward on the best basis envisaged by our Charter -- that is, a basis which has succeeded in harmonizing the views of the Members of the United Nations. We commend the draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/L.189 to this Committee for its unanimous adoption.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from French): Members will recall that a number of draft resolutions have been submitted to the Committee. First, there was the draft resolution presented by the delegation of Czechoslovakia (A/C.1/L.183). Then, there was the draft resolution submitted by eight Powers (A/C.1/L.187), which has now been revised to include Mexico as one of its sponsors. We also had amendments submitted by the delegation of Japan (A/C.1/L.188). Today, the Committee has received a sixteen-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.189).

(The Chairman)

I believe that I am not mistaken when I say that the delegation of Czechoslovakia is not pressing its draft resolution to the vote, and that that is also the case of the sponsors of the nine-Power draft resolution. The Committee therefore has before it only one draft resolution -- A/C.1/L.189 -- which I now put to the vote.

The draft resolution was adopted unanimously.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from French): I think that I am expressing the feelings of all the members of this Committee when I say how pleased I am that this draft resolution has been adopted unanimously. I should like to express the hope that this spirit of conciliation which has permitted the Committee to arrive at a unanimous decision on this question will continue to manifest itself and will grow even stronger. This will obviously facilitate the Committee's discussion of items still before it.

I shall now call on any representatives who wish to explain their votes.

Mr. SHAHA (Nepal): It was not because of a lack of interest in the subject that my delegation did not take part earlier in the debate. We honestly felt that our intervention in the discussion would not serve any useful purpose because we had nothing new to contribute in the light of our own research and experience.

We are happy that now there is a general agreement on the question of objectively studying the effects of atomic radiation with a view to taking every possible measure to protect man and his environment against the possible hazards. Though we found that there was no unanimity of opinion of the extent of the dangers of atomic radiation, all delegations were agreed that the rise in the radioactive level in the world is deleterious to human health and wellbeing. We have been told that the rise in the radioactive level might produce serious consequences for the very existence of the human race. The radioactive fall-out resulting from the tests of atomic weapons has been held by some to be mainly responsible for the contamination of the air, the water and the soil, and for genetic and biological effects of a dangerous kind affecting even future and unborn generations. A distinction has also been drawn by some between atomic radiation from the natural background and radiation from man-made sources, such as X-ray treatment, and so on, on the one hand, and the radioactive fall-out resulting from the nuclear tests on the other hand. We have been told that atomic radiation effects bring about mutation of genes and cause bone cancer, leukaemia and other serious diseases.

After having heard all the other speakers who are more qualified than we are to speak on the subject, my delegation has come to the conclusion that it is a matter which should be approached neither in a spirit of panic nor in the spirit of self-complacency. We also feel that the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation has been pursuing its efforts in the field assiduously and ardently, and the publication of its report in due course will go a long way in enlightening public opinion in the world about the true effects of atomic radiation.

In the view of my delegation the treatment of a question such as this, which is of a purely scientific nature, should not be guided by political and other extraneous considerations. We honestly believe that this Committee has been

(Mr. Shaha, Nepal)

very wise in finally working out and adopting unanimously a resolution on the subject which is acceptable to all. This resolution which has just been adopted unanimously will, we hope, further stimulate the effort and enterprise in the field of studying the effects of atomic radiation which have been a cause of so much concern and anxiety to the peoples the world over.

Mr. ILLUECA (Panama) (interpretation from Spanish): With permission, I should like to explain the vote cast by my country. Panama, together with the other Latin American countries, is profoundly concerned with the problems bearing on the effects of atomic radiation both on mankind and on man's environment.

My delegation studied very carefully the draft resolution (A/C.1/L.183) submitted by Czechoslovakia, and then proceeded to read very carefully the joint draft resolution submitted by Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, France, Mexico, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America in document A/C.1/L.187. The amendments (A/C.1/L.188) proposed by Japan to the latter also warranted our careful attention.

These draft resolutions reiterated and stressed the grave concern expressed in General Assembly resolution 913 (X) of December 1955 which set up the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and entrusted to it, among other things, the task of collating in its report information on the effects of radiation on man and his environment. It is, we believe, the self same concern that led the delegation of Japan to submit its amendments, which pinpointed more precisely the problem of the effects of artificial radiation resulting from nuclear tests.

My delegation is, therefore, extremely gratified that, thanks to the brilliant work done by the representative of India, the different points of view have been brought together and merged, and that a joint draft resolution has been submitted to us and unanimously adopted by the Committee.

I shall explain very briefly the reasons for which my delegation voted in favour of that joint draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/L.189. Today we are all running risks which are really no less great than those which resolution 913 (X) sought to avoid. And we have as yet found no possible answer

(Mr. Illueca, Panama)

to these dangers, which have become greater than can be expressed in any resolution. Studies published by scientists of different nationalities who examine the problem of radiation from a purely scientific standpoint have confronted us with a most discouraging reality -- I would almost say with a terrifying fact. This fact is such that indifference might represent aiding and abetting the desire to wipe out humanity.

Humanity is faced by dire dangers, and in order to avert those dangers a resolution has now been adopted in this Committee. In order that that resolution may be implemented, we must bear in mind the fact that, as has been stressed in the Committee, the effects of atomic radiation do not merely result in grave mutations, or even death, for the person suffering from them, but go much beyond and reappear in future generations, with the subsequent threat of creating a deformed and monstrous generation, not only physically speaking but also psychologically speaking.

A number of representatives have stressed during the debate that the work we are discussing is very close to the work connected with disarmament. I would go even further and say that it is an integral part of disarmament. One of the causes of the increase in artificial radiation levels is the holding of nuclear tests. Therefore, one has to accept the fact that those who, in self-defence and in defence of their descendants, especially the children throughout the world, seek to bring about a suspension of nuclear tests as soon as possible are quite right.

Then, however, we have to ask ourselves whether we can possibly suspend nuclear tests when the arms race seems daily to endanger international peace and security. An objective analysis of this question must obviously lead us to the conclusion that the first element is the rebirth of confidence among peoples -- confidence that will permit the reopening of negotiations in order that it may be possible to arrive at a full disarmament agreement which will offer guarantees to all parties and thus lead to a final suspension of nuclear tests which are being carried on before the horror-stricken gaze of humanity.

In making known the view of my delegation on the subject, I am very happy to note in conclusion that, by a fortunate coincidence, the countries submitting the draft resolutions preceding that which has now been adopted are all members of the

(Mr. Illueca, Panama)

Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. This circumstance, no doubt, will imbue this draft resolution with a high scientific and moral value since it comes from countries that have the greatest amount of scientific knowledge on this extremely difficult and delicate problem which greatly concerns the peoples of all countries, whether large or small. This is a danger which knows no political or ideological frontiers. Perhaps today we are taking a good step forward towards the re-establishment of an atmosphere of confidence which humanity needs in order to solve its own fundamental problems.

Those are the reasons for which my delegation voted in favour of the joint draft resolution.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from French): We have thus come to the end of our consideration of item 57 of the agenda, "Effects of atomic radiation", and the Rapporteur will present the report on our deliberations to the General Assembly. The next item on our agenda is the Korean question. However, as I indicated at an earlier meeting, I feel that, before considering the Korean question, item 23, the Committee should decide on the priority of remaining items on the agenda. Therefore, with the consent of the Committee, I now propose to take up the question of the priority of the pending items.

Mr. ENTEZAM (Iran) (interpretation from French): As the Chairman has just noted, he suggested at the meeting of 7 November that, after disposing of item 57, "Effects of atomic radiation", the Committee should be called upon to pronounce itself on the priority of remaining items. Accordingly, the delegations of the African and Asian countries have decided unanimously to suggest that item 62, the question of West Irian, should be discussed after the Korean question, and that the next item to be discussed should be item 59, the question of Algeria. If this proposal is accepted, then, the question of West Irian will become the fourth item on the agenda of the First Committee, and the question of Algeria will become the fifth item.

I should like to add that, in the opinion of the delegations on whose behalf I speak, all questions assigned to the First Committee are important and urgent. Proposing that one item should be discussed before another does not mean that that first item is necessarily more important. There are other factors to be taken into consideration: the question of timeliness, the views of the parties, other views that are to be taken into account, and so on. It is with these factors in mind that we have presented to the Committee the proposal which I have just put forward.

Our proposal refers merely to the priority of the two items I have mentioned, the question of West Irian and the question of Algeria. We feel that proposals as to the other two items on the agenda might well come from other parties.

Mr. de la COLINA (Mexico) (interpretation from Spanish): As a result of conversations held with some of the delegations directly concerned, I should like to make the suggestion that the next two items to be discussed by the Committee, after the two that have just been put forward by the representative of Iran, should be the Cyprus question and the declaration concerning the peaceful coexistence of States.

Mr. STRATOS (Greece) (interpretation from French): In accordance with rule 100 of the rules of procedure, the Committee should discuss all questions referred to it by the General Assembly, and it must allocate a suitable amount of time for a proper examination of all items. The sequence in which these questions are discussed acquires importance only if a delegation has vital reasons for asking that its item be examined before any others. The Greek delegation does not feel in a position to withstand the friendly pressure that has been placed upon it to the effect that West Irian and Algeria should be discussed before Cyprus. As I have pointed out, my delegation realizes that all items will be examined. That being so, we feel that, since the parties concerned have agreed that the two items mentioned should be discussed first, opposing this request would be an unfriendly gesture and might well be construed as indicating a lack of understanding on our part. However, I think that I may well place before the Committee my request that every item should in fact be discussed and that not more than one week should be spent in discussing any one item. If an item cannot be disposed of within a week by maintaining a normal schedule, then night meetings should be scheduled so as to ensure that consideration of an item will be completed in a reasonable time.

We are grateful to the representative of Mexico for his courtesy in wishing to assign suitable priority to the remaining questions. We feel confident that the representative of the Soviet Union will not object to this proposal because the question of Cyprus should in fact be examined following the other questions for which priority has already been requested.

Mr. BELAUNDE (Peru) (interpretation from Spanish): I note with a great deal of happiness and joy that there is an atmosphere of understanding and of comprehension that may auger well for the success of our work.

I share with the representative of Iran the conviction that the order in which we discuss matters is not very important. We are not setting up a hierarchy of values or of importance of the subjects before the Committee. They are all equally important. The order is, more than anything else, a matter of timeliness, of urgency at times -- but not of greater or lesser importance.

I also agree with the representative of Greece that if, regarding the order, we can only be led by feelings of friendship and understanding, we must be strict regarding the time given to the study of each subject and the attention given to each subject.

(Mr. Belaunde, Peru)

I am sure that you, Mr. Chairman, with your well known wisdom and sagacity and with the help of your co-operators, the Vice-Chairman, the Rapporteur and the Secretary, will conduct our meetings in such a way that all the items will receive the importance they deserve. I wish to support the proposal made by the representative of Iran, Mr. Entezam, who, in addition to speaking for himself, also spoke for the Afro-Asian group. I do not think that the view he expressed will be opposed by any section of our Committee. I also support the suggestion made by the representative of Mexico that after dealing with the Algerian question we should then deal with the Cyprus question. Here, again, I am extremely happy that I can agree with the representative of Greece, and I hope that the representative of the Soviet Union will not object to this order, especially if peaceful co-existence means what we all believe it to mean.

It is a pity that there is not a more expressive word in English for peaceful co-existence, such as exists in Spanish in the word "convivencia", which means to live together. This implies co-operating with one another, and it would be a harbinger of success for our work if we could crown our work of this year by discussing co-existence in an atmosphere in which we agreed with the Soviet Union, and, of course, the greatest crown of co-existence would be if we started with the Cyprus question and then ended with the question of peaceful co-existence.

The CHAIRMAN (interpretation from French): May I sum up the situation as it stands at the moment. Fortunately, it is quite simple. The Committee has just heard a series of suggestions on the future order of our work. First of all, the representative of Iran suggested that the question of West Irian be item 4 on our agenda, followed by the question of Algeria as item 5. Then the representative of Mexico suggested that item 6 be the question of Cyprus and item 7 the question of peaceful co-existence. These suggestions have been supported, and the representative of Peru summed up and gave the support of his delegation. These proposals could be considered separately, but since there have been no objections I would ask you to make known your views on them as a whole. If there are no objections, the proposals will be considered as adopted. The proposals are adopted.

Before adjourning the meeting, I would point out that the Committee will meet again tomorrow at 10.30 a.m., when we will take up the Korean question.

The meeting rose at 12.45 p.m.