



# General Assembly

Seventy-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General  
1 April 2020

Original: English

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## Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

### Summary record of the 13th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 24 October 2019, at 3 p.m.

*Chair:* Mr. Bahr Aluloom ..... (Iraq)  
*later:* Mr. Ahidjo ..... (Cameroon)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Agenda item 48: Effects of atomic radiation**  
(A/74/46 and A/C.4/74/L.6)

1. **Ms. Hirth** (Australia) Chair of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, introducing the report of the Scientific Committee on its sixty-sixth session (A/74/46) and accompanying her statement with a digital slide presentation, said that the Scientific Committee had a purely scientific mandate; it did not advise on protection or policies, although States and international organizations drew on its evaluations when developing protection frameworks, legal instruments, policies and programmes concerning the use of technologies employing ionizing radiation.

2. The Scientific Committee was currently implementing nine projects developed through expert groups, and two ad hoc working groups were handling specific cross-cutting tasks. The sixty-sixth session of the Scientific Committee had been attended by 25 of its 27 member States, the four observer countries, eight observer international organizations and more than 150 scientists. Mexico and the Sudan had not sent representatives. In that connection, the Scientific Committee wished to highlight the importance of having representatives of all its member States present at every session and to remind members that financial support was available from the United Nations to fund the participation of one representative per member State.

3. At the session, the Scientific Committee had welcomed the appointment of a new Scientific Secretary in April 2019 and the process established by the General Assembly for dealing with any increases in membership in the future. It had selected a new bureau, approved an outreach strategy for the period 2020–2024 and established an ad hoc working group on sources and exposure. It had also approved two scientific annexes, which should be published in early 2020. The first was an evaluation of selected health effects and inference of risk due to radiation exposure, while, the aim of the second annex, concerning lung cancer from exposure to radon, had been to update and clarify approaches to assessing doses of radiation and the risk of lung cancer associated with exposure to radon.

4. The Scientific Committee's programme of work comprised a number of highly relevant topics. Fortunately, the major administrative challenges that had delayed the initiation of new studies in 2018 had been overcome. At its next session, the Scientific Committee would review reports on biological mechanisms relevant for the inference of cancer risks

from low-dose radiation; medical and occupational exposure to ionizing radiation; and levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station. Work on the topics of second primary cancer after radiotherapy and epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer was now under way, having been delayed until the appointment of the Scientific Secretary.

5. Following the publication of its 2013 report on levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, the Scientific Committee had established an expert group to continuously review new scientific literature. The expert group had issued white papers in 2015, 2016 and 2017 confirming the report's major assumptions and findings. At its sixty-fifth session the Scientific Committee had decided that it would publish an updated report, and at its sixty-sixth session it had decided to complete the report in 2020, ahead of the tenth anniversary of the accident. The Scientific Committee acknowledged the substantial contribution to its General Trust Fund by the Government of Japan, as well as important in-kind contributions from other States, to produce the 2020 report.

6. Turning to studies on the Scientific Committee's current programme of work, she said that questionnaires for the global surveys of medical and occupational exposure to ionizing radiation had been developed in collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Scientific Committee's secretariat had launched an online platform to facilitate the collection of the data. As at October 2019, 58 countries had responded to the three medical exposure questionnaires and 53 had responded to the occupational exposure questionnaire. Contact points for the coordination of data collection had been appointed by 90 member States, and she invited the remaining members to appoint contact points of their own. The Scientific Committee was currently evaluating the data that had been submitted by 30 September 2019. It had also begun a new public exposure study, which would include a similar survey.

7. At its sixty-third session, the Scientific Committee had agreed on long-term strategic directions for its work beyond 2019. The ad hoc working group established at the sixth-fifth session to assist in the development of the programme of work concerning the effects and mechanisms of radiation exposure for the period 2020–2024 had successfully prepared a proposal and, on that basis, its mandate had been extended for an additional year. The Scientific Committee had also established an ad hoc working group on sources and exposure to

examine the future programme of work on that topic. Scientists from States not part of its membership were increasingly involved in collecting and evaluating medical and occupational exposures and in reporting on lung cancer from radon exposure.

8. The Scientific Committee's newly adopted five-year outreach strategy complemented the planned outreach activities concerning the 2020 Fukushima report. The amount of work put into the dissemination of the Scientific Committee's evaluations would depend on the level of financial and human resources made available to its secretariat. The secretariat continued to liaise with other organizations, such as IAEA, ILO and WHO, directly and through the Inter-Agency Committee on Radiation Safety, to minimize duplication of efforts.

9. The delay in recruiting the new Scientific Secretary had had a negative impact on the Scientific Committee's work, and every effort must be made to ensure that such a situation was not repeated. The Scientific Committee hoped that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) would provide better administrative support to the secretariat and follow through on its promise to upgrade the post of Scientific Officer to Deputy Secretary in the near future, in order to avoid the recurrence of the problems that had plagued the Scientific Committee in recent years. The Scientific Committee was grateful for the contributions of certain States to the General Trust Fund, which had accelerated the work of the secretariat and financed the vast majority of outreach efforts.

10. The Scientific Committee's objectivity, independence, competence and high-quality work had earned it the respect of the international community and must be safeguarded in order to enable it to continue supplying authoritative data, information and evaluations to inform the decisions of Governments and international bodies. She should be grateful if the General Assembly would encourage Member States to provide sufficient voluntary contributions in a predictable and sustainable manner.

11. **Mr. Dabouis** (Observer for the European Union), speaking also on behalf of the candidate countries Albania, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process country Bosnia and Herzegovina; and, in addition, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union was satisfied with the outcome of the sixty-sixth session of the Scientific Committee, whose work and assessments were central to improving international scientific understanding of exposure to ionizing radiation and its health and environmental effects, and to making

essential and authoritative scientific information available to the international community.

12. The European Union welcomed the approval for publication of the scientific annexes on the evaluation of selected health effects and inference of risk due to radiation exposure and on lung cancer from exposure to radon; the advanced status of the draft report on mechanisms of radiation actions and biological reactions relevant for the inference of cancer risk after low-dose exposure; the Scientific Committee's recognition of the importance of completing the analysis of the data on medical exposure in order to have the technical document submitted for approval at its sixty-seventh session; its intention to consider epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer and second primary cancer after radiotherapy at its sixty-seventh session; its decision to commence its evaluation of public exposure to ionizing radiation; and the planned update to the 2013 report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the Fukushima nuclear accident. The results of research by the European Union would contribute to the work of the Scientific Committee, as the priorities of the two entities were aligned.

13. **Mr. García Moritán** (Argentina) said that his country supported the work of the Scientific Committee through its national experts and the provision of practical support, such as the translation of documents into Spanish. The administration-related provisions of General Assembly resolution [73/261](#) were very important, as they provided the secretariat with the platform to carry out its work appropriately.

14. His delegation strongly supported the inclusion of the topics of second primary cancer after radiotherapy and epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer in the future programme of work. With regard to epistemology, it was crucial to distinguish the proven effects of high doses of radiation from the theoretical effects of small doses. In that connection, the policy of drawing a clear distinction between the attribution and inference of risks established in the Scientific Committee's 2012 report should be maintained and strengthened, and the long-term strategic directions should be adjusted to that end. The UNEP booklet *Radiation: Effects and Sources* had proved to be a useful means of informing the public and should be updated to reflect the conclusions of the Scientific Committee's 2012 report. His delegation welcomed the publication of the booklet in various languages, including some that were not official languages of the United Nations.

15. The findings of the Scientific Committee played an important role by providing the scientific evidence

that informed the decisions of the international community and the development of safety standards. The findings on lung cancer from exposure to radon were particularly important, as they refuted a number of erroneous ideas that had recently been given consideration in a number of forums on the topic. In that connection, United Nations entities that established intergovernmental protection standards under the auspices of IAEA should take note of the recommendation in paragraph 56 (l) of the report of the Scientific Committee (A/74/46) concerning the dose conversion factor used for radon exposure.

16. **Mr. Mohsin** (Pakistan) said that his Government's peaceful use of nuclear technology was supported by a robust national framework of policies and procedures to protect workers, the general public and the environment. National regulations were developed on the basis of the Scientific Committee's reports and IAEA standards. An independent supervisory authority oversaw all matters related to radiation and nuclear safety in his country's nuclear facilities, which were required to develop appropriate protection procedures and policies and to monitor radiation levels in their vicinity. His Government was firmly committed to further enhancing its infrastructure, capacity and personnel training, in collaboration with relevant international organizations; contributing to the radiation safety regime; and participating actively in the sessions of the Scientific Committee.

17. **Mr. Kaneto** (Japan) said that Japan had long been committed to nuclear safety, particularly following the 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, and therefore commended the work of the Scientific Committee to broaden knowledge and deepen understanding of the levels, effects and risks of ionizing radiation exposure, based on independent and scientific evidence.

18. Noting the importance of disseminating the Scientific Committee's findings, his delegation welcomed the publication of the report, white papers and annexes on the levels and effects of radiation exposure after the 2011 great east-Japan earthquake and tsunami and looked forward to the update to the 2013 report on the topic. His delegation welcomed the appointment of the new Scientific Secretary based on scientific competence. Japan remained committed to supporting the Scientific Committee's efforts to deepen understanding of the effects of ionizing radiation.

19. **Mr. Rivero Rosario** (Cuba) said that Scientific Committee studies could respond to specific demands from the scientific community and inform national and international standard-setting for protection against the harmful effects of ionizing radiation. Seventy-four years

after the criminal atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear weapons remained a latent threat. Cuba reaffirmed its position that the total elimination of nuclear weapons was the only effective way to guarantee that humanity never again suffered their terrible effects and was fully committed to achieving the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world. Accordingly, in January 2018 Cuba had become the fifth country to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, effectively contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security.

20. International cooperation was crucial in the response to accidents and other unanticipated disasters. Despite economic difficulties stemming from the cruel economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba for almost 60 years, his country had assisted the brotherly people of Ukraine following the Chernobyl accident through a humanitarian programme in Tarará. In addition to providing care to over 20,000 people affected by atomic radiation, the programme was important scientifically, as the data collected had been disseminated at major scientific events and used by several agencies and institutions of the United Nations system. It was important to maintain and strengthen collaboration between the Scientific Committee and bodies such as WHO, IAEA and UNEP. Such cooperation had facilitated the implementation of the Scientific Committee's strategic directions, the benefits of which had been visible through the application of technological advances, particularly in health and environmental protection.

21. The contribution of nuclear energy and technology to the socioeconomic development of nations was incontestable. Cuba therefore reiterated the right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy without discrimination and was convinced that serious and wide-ranging cooperation on the peaceful use of nuclear energy was the only path to eliminating the potential dangers associated with ionizing radiation.

22. *Mr. Ahidjo (Cameroon), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

23. **Mr. Ilnytskyi** (Ukraine) said that the Scientific Committee made a significant contribution to informing the general public about the sources and effects of ionizing radiation. His delegation welcomed the appointment of the Scientific Secretary and the establishment of the post of Deputy Secretary, following a period of staffing disruption within the secretariat of the Scientific Committee. To safeguard the continuity and sustainability of the Scientific Committee's work, UNEP should ensure that all future recruitment processes were conducted in a transparent, effective and

timely manner. Given the importance of the Scientific Committee's work for current and future generations, more must be done to ensure that it had sufficient financial and human resources.

24. There was a continuing need to compile information about ionizing radiation and analyse its effects. The Scientific Committee's reports on exposure to low-dose radiation from artificial or naturally occurring sources and on medical exposure were widely used in Ukraine in the assessment of long-term cancer risk following the Chernobyl disaster. They were also used by the relevant United Nations entities and should be disseminated widely. Ukraine remained ready to support the Scientific Committee's work by sharing its national experience and research concerning the effects of radiation on human health and the environment.

25. The most important lesson learned from the Chernobyl accident was that lasting improvements must be made to nuclear and radiation safety globally. His Government had taken steps to further prevent the release of contaminants from the site of the former Chernobyl plant and transfer liquid nuclear waste into appropriate long-term storage. Ukraine recognized the Scientific Committee's contribution to the development of national laws and standards concerning radiation and supported its current activities, including the development of the means of estimating human exposure to radiation and its research on the biological effects of selected internal emitters and radiation exposure as a result of electricity generation. The Scientific Committee should maintain its scientific focus and independence.

26. **Mr. Mackay** (Belarus) said that his delegation was satisfied with the work of the Scientific Committee at its sixty-sixth session and welcomed its work on medical and occupational exposure to ionizing radiation, the draft update to the 2013 report on the Fukushima nuclear accident and the approval of the two scientific annexes on selected health effects and inference of risk due to radiation exposure, and on lung cancer from exposure to radon, respectively. The Scientific Committee had provided valuable analyses, predictions and recommendations following the Chernobyl accident, which his Government had taken into account in its protection efforts. The Scientific Committee should also continue to examine the impact of the disaster on human health and the environment. Belarus had participated in the preparation of the white paper on post-Chernobyl thyroid cancer in the States most affected by the disaster. The Scientific Committee should play a visible role in post-Chernobyl cooperation activities, in order to enhance its profile and raise public awareness of the outcomes of its work. His delegation would be

interested in participating in joint activities with the Scientific Committee ahead of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the Chernobyl accident in 2021.

27. **Mr. Misra** (India), welcoming the appointment of the Scientific Secretary, said that his delegation would continue to support the work of the Scientific Committee and share its own knowledge, experience and technical expertise. India appreciated the Scientific Committee's studies on the health effects and inference of risk associated with radiation exposure and on the risk of lung cancer from exposure to radon, which could help inform the guidelines being developed for the protection of uranium mine workers from the harmful effects of radiation. However, it should be noted that thorough research conducted by Indian scientists over four decades in densely populated areas of Kerala with high levels of naturally occurring background radiation indicated that the background radiation had not increased cancer-related morbidity or mortality among the inhabitants. Given that a growing body of researchers did not support the "linear no-threshold" model for estimating the health effects of low-dose radiation exposure, integrated radiobiological and epidemiological studies should be carried out at the international level to collect more systematic information on the health effects of low-dose radiation, and the "linear no-threshold" hypothesis should be re-examined.

28. As part of the Scientific Committee's outreach programme, India had translated the booklet *Radiation: Effects and Sources* into Hindi and would continue to publish information in various regional languages. His delegation welcomed the new members of the Scientific Committee and their active participation in its work thus far. It also welcomed the efforts of the Scientific Committee to enhance understanding of nuclear radiation, which would help to dispel the unfounded fears that were often a source of public opposition to the adoption of nuclear energy, an environmentally friendly source of energy with the potential to improve people's quality of life.

29. **Mr. Ngouambe Wouaga** (Cameroon) said that his delegation commended the valuable ongoing work of the Scientific Committee, and reiterated its support of and cooperation with that body. By adopting a radiation-protection law in 1995 and establishing a national radiation protection agency in 2002, his Government had joined the international community's efforts to face the threat of ionizing radiation. Those measures remained relevant in the current climate of insecurity in Central Africa, particularly in Cameroon. It had also introduced measures regulating ionizing radiation-source use; import, export and transportation of

radioactive materials; radioactive waste management; and dosimetric monitoring of workers. A review of the country's legislative and regulatory framework on radiological protection begun in 2010, with a view to aligning it with international standards, had culminated in the adoption of a new law on radiation safety and nuclear security. Cooperating closely with IAEA, Cameroon had, inter alia, signed its second Country Programme Framework with the Agency, covering the period from 2014 to 2018. Cameroon had also received support from IAEA for the delivery of capacity-building activities and training for experts and workers, and from friendly countries such as the United States for the acquisition of radiation detection equipment. The Scientific Committee should continue to provide the international community with information about the effects of ionizing radiation on human health and the environment.

30. **Ms. Elayoubi** (Algeria) said that her country had experienced the impact of radioactive contamination first-hand as a result of the nuclear tests conducted therein in the 1960s, which had adversely affected generations of its inhabitants. Her Government had enacted legislation to curb the effects of atomic radiation and monitor its sources. The Algerian Atomic Energy Commission ensured compliance with the existing regulatory framework and standards for radiation sources, issued permits for the use of radioactive materials and provided training for users.

31. Her delegation welcomed the establishment of the working group on sources and exposure and the prolongation of the activities of the ad hoc working group on effects and mechanisms. It also welcomed the scientific annexes produced by the Scientific Committee, which would benefit the medical, academic and professional communities. The public information and outreach strategy for the period 2020–2024 would maximize the success of those studies. Algeria commended the Scientific Committee's efforts to cooperate with other international organizations and encouraged it to engage in similar cooperation with relevant regional agencies.

32. **Mr. El Mezouaghi** (Morocco) said that his delegation welcomed the Scientific Committee's recent achievements, including the approval of the two scientific annexes on selected health effects and inference of risk due to radiation exposure, and on lung cancer from exposure to radon, respectively, and the adoption of the new outreach strategy. His Government, with support from international partners, continued to align its institutional practices and legislation with international protection and safety standards. The Moroccan Agency for Nuclear Safety and Security

ensured the safety of workers, patients, the population and the environment. Its current strategic plan with regard to ionizing radiation was focused on monitoring exposure in the workplace; monitoring medical exposure; taking the necessary measures to keep radon levels below the legal limit in at-risk areas; managing the risk of radiation exposure from naturally occurring sources; and monitoring and reducing the risk of exposure in potential emergency situations, including through the installation of environmental monitoring systems that would help determine the exposure of the population in the event of an incident.

33. **Archbishop Auza** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Fukushima accident had underlined the potentially catastrophic impact of nuclear accidents resulting from unanticipated disasters. The Scientific Committee's updated report on the effects of the accident would provide important new information concerning the health status of those who had been exposed to ionizing radiation and the long-term effects of such exposure. It would also likely contribute to technological advancements concerning radiation containment, the mitigation of other risks associated with the generation of nuclear power, and the design of nuclear power plants. The Scientific Committee's work on medical and occupational exposure to radiation and the risk of cancer from low doses of radiation was also of vital importance.

34. Current interest in potential new uses for nuclear reactors and the continuing risk of the deployment of nuclear weapons meant that risks associated with atomic radiation remained and might even increase. Given that the testing of nuclear weapons had resulted in the largest cumulative dose of man-made radiation unleashed on the world thus far, non-proliferation efforts should be focused not only on disarmament but also on a comprehensive nuclear test ban. In that connection, the Holy See urged all States to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

35. It was important for the Scientific Committee to have adequate human and financial resources in order to continue to provide the international community with the information it required to address matters concerning nuclear energy and ionizing radiation.

36. **Ms. Henderson** (Australia) said that the appointment of a woman as Chair of the Scientific Committee was a positive step towards gender parity in high-level technical positions. Australia welcomed the update on the Committee's long-term strategic directions provided in the report of the Scientific Committee (A/74/46), the elaboration of two scientific



annexes and the development of the outreach strategy for the period 2020–2024. Her delegation commended the dedication of the scientists who undertook the vast majority of the Scientific Committee's work on an unpaid basis. The secretariat worked tirelessly to coordinate the work of the Scientific Committee and should be afforded strong support by States and the Secretary-General. Australia welcomed the appointment of the Scientific Secretary.

*Draft resolution A/C.4/74/L.6: Effects of atomic radiation*

37. **Ms. Henderson** (Australia), introducing the draft resolution, said that it highlighted the valuable contribution of the Scientific Committee to increasing and harmonizing knowledge of the effects of ionizing radiation and reaffirmed the Scientific Committee's mandate to independently provide the scientific basis for the evaluation of radiation risks and the establishment of protection measures.

38. **Ms. Sharma** (Secretary of the Committee) said that Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Czechia, Fiji, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, Palau, Peru, Poland, Portugal, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Thailand and Ukraine had joined the sponsors of the draft resolution.

39. **The Chair** said that the draft resolution had no programme budget implications.

40. *Draft resolution A/C.4/74/L.6 was adopted.*

*The meeting rose at 4.40 p.m.*