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STATEMENT BY SECRETARY-GENERAL DAG HAMMARSKJOLD AT THE OPENING
OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EFFECTS
OF ATOMIC RADIATION, 27 JANUARY 1958, AT UN HEADQUARTERS

May I welcome you again to the Headquarters of the United Nations.

The heavy responsibility entrusted to this Committee needs no underscoring. The special importance of calm and scientific appraisal of the effects of ionizing radiations in place of public speculation and alarm, too often nourished by misinformation, has apparently increased since this Committee first met here. Indeed, the Twelfth General Assembly reaffirmed the importance it attaches to the Committee's work when, last November, it requested you to expedite the completion of the comprehensive report which you are now preparing.

In earlier meetings the Committee has considered the scope and organization of its task, the detailed information it requires, the form and content of its full report. Now the crucial stage of formulation of the report has been reached. I can well understand, therefore, that the immediate future for this Committee promises only very hard work. It is no small task to try to expound, with scientific precision and accuracy, but still in words simple enough to permit some understanding by the layman, the profoundly technical subject-matter of radiation.

I suppose that in this regard what is most important for all of us to bear in mind is that, although this is a United Nations Committee, its members are scientists and are expected to speak as scientists. It goes without saying, I take it, that all that you say will be reviewed intently by your scientific colleagues all around the world. It will certainly mean very much to the world if international science, as here represented, can speak on this vital subject of radiation effects with a single, objective voice.

Thinking of the report to be prepared, it would seem worth repeating what was said at an earlier meeting: this Committee is not called upon to try to produce answers to questions which cannot be answered on the basis of present scientific research; rather, to define and delimit what that research does and does not tell us today is in itself a uniquely valuable service.

(more)

In concluding, may I point to further evidence of the continuing concern of the General Assembly with the subject of ionizing radiations, expressed in its resolution of 14 November 1957, which requests the Secretary-General, in consultation with this Committee, "to consider the question of the strengthening and widening of scientific activities in this field, .." and to submit his findings to the Thirteenth Session of the General Assembly. This will provide an opportunity, at an appropriate time, for further fruitful collaboration.

And now, I have no doubt, you will wish to get on with the serious work which has brought you here, and which I am sure, will produce good results.

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