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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 21st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 11 November 1999, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Zackheos . . . . . (Cyprus)

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00-22311 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 86: Effects of atomic radiation (*continued*) (A/54/46, A/C.4/54/L.20)

1. **Mr. Dausa** (Cuba) said that since its establishment, in 1955, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation had played an important role in informing States, above all developing countries, about sources of radiation, and in furthering knowledge about the effects of radiation and its impact on man and the environment. In analysing the results of the Scientific Committee's work, particular attention should be paid to the Committee's constant cooperation with various bodies of the United Nations system, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Cuba believed that the strengthening of that cooperation and support for the work of the Scientific Committee would make it possible to achieve substantial progress in scientific activities for the benefit of all mankind. Atomic energy had been developed as a result of the growing demand for energy in most countries of the world. It was used most frequently in such spheres as medicine, industry and agriculture, and in that connection there was a growing need for countries with developed nuclear potential not to deny other States the right to enjoy the benefits of the peaceful uses of atomic energy. In considering the item, such aspects as the transfer of technology and technical cooperation were very important, and countries possessing greater resources should make the most significant contribution in that sphere.

2. At the same time atomic radiation continued to pose great dangers to man and the environment, and that potential danger could be eliminated only through international cooperation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Atomic energy could not be permitted to be used for non-peaceful purposes, and in that context one of the main goals of the Scientific Committee's work should be to eliminate all nuclear facilities and remove the threat posed by the possession of nuclear weapons.

3. **Mr. Rayani** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that the Scientific Committee played an important role in analysing the dangers of atomic radiation; its report contained information on a broad spectrum of problems in that respect. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya recommended that the Scientific Committee should continue its efforts and attached great importance to the dissemination of information; the competent agencies in that sphere, such as IAEA and intergovernmental organizations, should provide all possible support to the Scientific Committee in the collection and submission of scientific and technical information on the effects of atomic radiation. Any radiation leak from nuclear facilities posed a threat to man and the environment. Active cooperation was also needed among nuclear-weapon States on the question of the utilization of nuclear waste.

4. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya hoped that the developed countries would help developing States ensure that nuclear energy was used for peaceful purposes. A dialogue must be established among States in order to exchange information on atomic radiation and the possibilities for the peaceful uses of atomic energy. In that connection, the danger posed by the nuclear reactors in the Middle East should be noted. All those reactors should be placed under the control of IAEA, and there should be no exceptions or discrimination among States. Furthermore, everything possible should be done to ensure the safe burial and elimination of toxic materials in order to prevent pollution of the environment.

5. Nuclear-weapon States should take steps to put an end to the use of nuclear reactors for military purposes. Those States should also take steps to prevent pollution of the marine environment and prohibit other pollution of that type. They should take responsibility for posing a threat to other States. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya requested the Scientific Committee to disseminate information on that subject, so that society would know about the danger posed by atomic radiation.

6. **Mr. Acharia** (India) said that, as mandated by the General Assembly, the Scientific Committee, at its forty-eighth session, held in Vienna from 12 to 16 April 1999, had continued its review of important problems on radiation doses and effects. In that connection, India shared the Committee's concern about radiation exposure and the possible health consequences. It should be noted that India had initiated a systematic study of the effects of continuous low-level exposure in the population living in areas with high background radiation, such as the state of Kerala on the south-western coast of India. India hoped that in future the Scientific Committee would devote its efforts to trying to understand the mechanisms of the

effects of low level radiation in humans, as well as in microbes, animals and plants.

7. **Mr. Haggag** (Egypt) noted the high quality of the Scientific Committee's documents; its periodic reports were a basis upon which regional and international institutions formulated norms and programmes of action in that sphere. Egypt was one of the founding members of the Scientific Committee, which, from the outset, had competently fulfilled the mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly in resolution 913 (X) in 1955. Moreover, on the basis of information received from Member States and international organizations and specialized agencies, it prepared reports on the effects of radiation on the environment and man, and it also conducted specialized research on the risks associated with the use of atomic energy. Egypt supported the work of the Scientific Committee and hoped that the draft resolution on the item would be supported by all delegations. His delegation was also looking forward to the completion and publication by the Scientific Committee of its comprehensive review of radiation issues, including man-made sources of radiation, and epidemiological and genetic aspects of the effects of radiation. He expressed appreciation for the cooperation of Member States and the specialized agencies, including UNEP, IAEA and WHO.

8. Nuclear technologies, if restricted to peaceful uses, could be useful and beneficial for people and Member States. That involved, in the first place, the application of nuclear technology in medicine, industry and agriculture. His delegation supported the process of the transfer of nuclear technologies to developing countries and believed that it was important that they should have unrestricted access to such technologies, as envisaged in article IV of the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

9. At the same time, following Egypt's call for the establishment of a zone free from nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East, the IAEA safeguards regime should be extended to all nuclear facilities. Particular attention should be paid to the real danger for the Egyptian people and other peoples of the region of the nuclear reactor located in the desert in Israel on the eastern border of Egypt. That reactor was not under any kind of international control, and it was not covered by IAEA safeguards.

10. In conclusion, his delegation announced that once again it wished to join the sponsors of the draft resolution on the agenda item; it expressed its willingness to cooperate with the Scientific Committee in the study of the effects of atomic radiation and determination of protective measures and means of their implementation.

11. **Mr. Al-Anbuge** (Iraq) said that the item under consideration was particularly significant because of the increased danger of the leak of radioactive materials from nuclear reactors, as had recently occurred in Japan. In addition, the increased danger was caused by the possibility of using nuclear weapons in an unstable international environment and the actual use of new types of nuclear weapons recently by the United States of America and the United Kingdom. During the aggression against Iraq in 1991, they had used over 300,000 tons of depleted uranium warheads. Later, those types of warheads had been used again in Yugoslavia in 1999.

12. Depleted uranium bombs were a new type of radiological weapon. When they exploded, chemical and radioactive dust fell into the environment, polluting vast areas; ionizing radiation of alpha and gamma particles also occurred, causing cancer. That data gave an idea of the scale of the disaster caused by the use of such weapons in Iraq. That type of pollution was very persistent, since the half-life of depleted uranium was 4.5 billion years. As a result of the effects of such radiation, people first suffered kidney and liver damage, and then their immune and reproductive systems were destroyed, and congenital defects appeared in children. According to reports made public under the Freedom of Information Act of the United States of America, the armed forces of the United States of America and the United Kingdom had dropped about 4,000 depleted uranium bombs on Iraqi targets, and A-10 aircraft of the United States air force had dropped 940,000 33-millimetre shells. A report prepared by the United Kingdom atomic energy authority indicated that radioactive sources remaining after the presence of the United Kingdom and United States forces in Kuwait and southern Iraq could lead to the deaths of half a million people even in the current generation. The statistics showed that in the first year after the use of depleted uranium shells, thousands of Iraqi children had died from various illnesses, and the most common cause of death was leukaemia.

13. The widespread use of that weapon had no military justification. Its use had led to mass casualties and pollution of the environment in the central and southern parts of Iraq. His Government assigned international responsibility to the United States of America and the United Kingdom for the grievous consequences of the use of that weapon for the Iraqi people and environment. Iraq reserved the right to demand compensation from those States for those criminal actions, which were in violation of Additional Protocol I to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, and were also a gross violation of the fundamental principles of human rights, and in the first place the right to life.

14. The international community and its international organizations, above all the Conference on Disarmament, must do everything possible to conclude an international convention prohibiting the use and production of depleted uranium for the purposes of weapons manufacture. In addition, the existing international conventions in the sphere of environmental protection must be strengthened, and additional steps must be taken as a deterrent to those who did not observe environmental requirements. The environmental disaster in Iraq, caused by the use of such weapons and intensified by economic sanctions, should spur the international community to fulfil its obligations and bring about a repeal of the sanctions against Iraq, and also contribute to improving the environmental situation in Iraq and eliminating the consequences of the pollution.

15. **Mr. Benitez Saenz** (Uruguay), speaking on behalf of the member countries of the Common Market of the Southern Cone (MERCOSUR), said that those countries attached great importance to the item under consideration. At its forty-eighth session in Vienna, the Scientific Committee had taken note of the concern about radiation exposures and the possible health consequences of earlier practices or events, such as the testing of nuclear weapons and the Chernobyl accident, and had recognized that everyone was exposed to radiation from natural background sources. That understanding was a useful basis for assessing the effects of man-made sources of radiation.

16. The MERCOSUR countries attached great importance to the question of ensuring the maximum safety of the maritime transport of radioactive waste and processed nuclear fuel in view of the danger such transport caused for the marine environment and the health of the local population. In that connection, the MERCOSUR countries once again appealed to the countries which engaged in such maritime transport to provide early notification of the routes chosen, and also to guarantee the payment of compensation in the case of accidents.

17. **Mr. Akopov** (Belarus) said that Belarus had always consistently supported the work of the Scientific Committee, whose radiological assessments were making a significant contribution to the formulation of international norms and standards of radiation security of such international organizations as IAEA and WHO.

18. For the Republic of Belarus, which had experienced the very complex consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, the work of the Scientific Committee had particular significance. Belarus had always aspired and continued to aspire to active cooperation with international organizations and institutes which could provide practical assistance in overcoming the consequences of the largest technological disaster of the twentieth century. In that connection, his delegation noted with satisfaction the work of the Scientific Committee, which in close cooperation with IAEA had conducted a number of studies in connection with the disaster, participated in the implementation of the International Chernobyl Project and, along with the European Commission, IAEA and WHO, had been involved in organizing the 1996 Conference “One Decade After Chernobyl: Summing Up the Consequences of the Accident”.

19. The scale of the Chernobyl disaster had forced Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine to appeal to the international community to provide assistance to the most severely affected areas of those countries, and Belarus welcomed the efforts of the United Nations to coordinate the international community in that respect. The draft resolutions on Chernobyl reflected the most acute needs of the affected countries, and the implementation of the draft resolutions could be of interest to the Scientific Committee, particularly in respect of the conduct of scientific research on the effects of radiation on the population and the environment.

20. The danger of the leak of radioactive materials in the area of the Chernobyl nuclear power station remained, and Belarus believed that the Chernobyl problem could not be confined to consideration of that issue alone. The alleviation of the medical,

environmental and economic consequences of the disaster should also remain at the centre of attention for the international community. At the same time, the "Chernobyl fatigue" of potential donor countries gave cause for concern. Belarus called on all interested States and international organizations to continue to provide the necessary assistance to the population which had been affected by the disaster.

21. Belarus supported the Scientific Committee's decision to complete a comprehensive review of radiation issues in 2000. The need to expand the links between the secretariat of the Scientific Committee and national bodies of States Members of the United Nations should be borne in mind. In Belarus there was a national commission on radiation protection which was concerned with the collection and analysis of information on the radiological situation in the country and also the formulation of recommendations regarding the effects of ionizing radiation on man and the environment. In view of the complex radiation situation in Belarus, the establishment and expansion of direct links between the national commission and the Scientific Committee would be advantageous for both parties.

22. **Mr. Miranda** (Peru) said that his delegation welcomed the report of the Scientific Committee and attached particular importance to utilizing the results of the research on the effects of various doses of radiation in such areas as medicine and agriculture, and also their biological effects. As a member of the Scientific Committee, Peru accorded priority attention to the safety of its own nuclear facilities, taking into account the recommendations and conclusions of that Committee, and was taking appropriate measures to ensure nuclear and radiological safety, and also the safety of radioactive waste management. The accumulation of scientific knowledge had given a boost to the process of ratification of the international convention on that subject and various legal norms establishing basic requirements in respect of protection from the effects of ionizing radiation. Peru awaited with interest the publication in 2000 of a comprehensive report of the Scientific Committee.

23. **Mr. Semenenko** (Ukraine) said that several years after the Chernobyl accident, the public perception of nuclear risk had completely changed. The accident had provided the impetus to the development of new research programmes on nuclear safety and at the same time given rise to a large number of problems of management. The lack of information provoked a feeling of distrust in the minds of the public, which was reinforced by the fact that people could not feel the effects of radiation, but it could easily be detected even at very low levels.

24. Thirteen years later, many improvements in radiation protection and emergency preparedness had been made possible by the Chernobyl experience, as well as a more accurate assessment of the impact of the accident. In that regard, the work of the Scientific Committee in conducting independent research on the effects, levels and risks of atomic radiation, gathering information and increasing people's knowledge about the real danger of ionizing radiation was very important. Ukraine hoped that in 2000 the Scientific Committee would provide in its report accurate information about the real situation in the Chernobyl nuclear power station which would give a new impulse to international cooperation in dealing with the whole spectrum of the Chernobyl aftermath.

25. His Government expressed appreciation to the European Union and the Group of Seven for their recent decision to take a leading role in the mobilization of resources for the shelter implementation plan. So far the Chernobyl fund had received about US$ 400 million of the US$ 780 million needed for the implementation of the plan. Ukraine hoped that the international community would increase its assistance to help Ukraine eliminate the after-effects of the worst technological catastrophe in the history of nuclear energy.

26. **Mr. Islam** (Pakistan) said that it was heartening to note that the Scientific Committee had achieved substantial progress in the work assigned to it by the General Assembly, particularly in creating awareness among Member States about the sources of radiation to mankind and the environment. In that connection, cooperation between the Scientific Committee and Member States should be further strengthened.

27. His delegation drew attention to the information provided in the report of the Scientific Committee that in the average worldwide individual doses of exposure caused by cosmic radiation and from terrestrial radionuclides present in the environment, natural radiation predominated. The growth of man-made sources of radiation, above all medical radiation, gave cause for concern. Nevertheless, medical radiation remained an important area of modern research which

must be continued because of its immense benefits to mankind. Another vital area to which the Scientific Committee had made a significant contribution was the research on the danger of radiation to subsequent generations. The Scientific Committee must continue to study all aspects of the problem of radiation from natural and man-made sources and pay increased attention to such issues as dose assessment methodologies; epidemiological evaluation of radiation-induced cancer; DNA repair and mutagenesis; combined effects of radiation and other agents; biological effects at low radiation doses — models, mechanisms and uncertainties; and also exposures and effects of the Chernobyl accident.

28. Pakistan welcomed the implementation of the General Assembly decision contained in resolution 53/44 of 3 December 1998 to uphold the recommendations of IAEA and WHO on the need to maintain the existing functions and role of the Scientific Committee, including the reporting arrangements. Pakistan, for its part, would continue to assist the Scientific Committee in its work with a view to minimizing the effects of atomic radiation on mankind and the environment.

Draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.20

29. **The Chairman** said that Malaysia, Monaco and Mongolia had become sponsors of draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.20; he took it that the Committee wished to adopt the draft resolution without a vote.

30. *Draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.20 was adopted.*

31. **Mr. Lamdan** (Israel) said that Israel had joined the consensus on draft resolution A/C.4/54/L.20, and stressed that earlier Israel had joined the consensus on the draft resolution on a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, which had been considered in the First Committee. As to the question of the possibility of leakage at Israeli nuclear facilities, he said that Arab scientists and leaders had frequently assured the public of their countries that there was no danger or signs of leakage from the Dimona facility.

32. **The Chairman** said that the Committee had completed its consideration of agenda item 86.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.