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HUMAN RIGHTS AND SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Report of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the benefits bestowed on mankind by scientific discoveries and by their application through technology were immense. Scientific advance was widely assumed to be an aspect of human progress, and no essential conflict between the two could generally be envisaged. The devastation caused by two world wars, made possible to a great extent by scientific and technological developments, contributed to an onset of doubts as to the existence of an inevitable alliance between scientific advance and human progress. Since the end of the Second World War such doubts have increased. The explosion of scientific knowledge and of its technological application which has taken place has not been accompanied by an equally urgent and profound consideration of the implications thereof for human rights. It has been asserted that such a consideration has become the more urgent since new scientific discoveries now pass more rapidly than ever into practical application. These expressions of doubt and urgency have been made by distinguished individuals, non-governmental organizations, Governments and intergovernmental organizations.

2. On 12 May 1968, the International Conference on Human Rights adopted resolution XI, on human rights and scientific and technological developments, which reads as follows:^{1/}

"The International Conference on Human Rights,

"Considering that scientific discoveries and their technological applications open up vast prospects for economic, social and cultural progress and for raising the level of living, and that they can by that token constitute a decisive factor in the effective application of human rights for all individuals and all peoples,

"Considering, however, that these discoveries and technological developments may entail certain dangers for the rights of the individual or of the group and for human dignity and that, in any event, their utilization raises complex ethical and legal problems with respect to human rights,

^{1/} Final Act of the International Conference on Human Rights, Teheran, 22 April to 13 May 1968 (United Nations publication, Sales No.: E.68.XIV.2), chap. III, resolution XI.

"1. Is of the opinion that these problems require thorough and continuous interdisciplinary studies at both the national and the international level, so that they may serve as a basis for drawing up appropriate standards, should the need arise:

"2. Recommends that the organizations of the United Nations family should undertake a study of the problems with respect to human rights arising from developments in science and technology, particularly with regard to:

"(a) Respect for privacy in view of recording techniques,

"(b) Protection of the human personality and its physical and intellectual integrity in view of the progress in biology, medicine and biochemistry;

"(c) The uses of electronics which may affect the rights of the person and the limits which should be placed on its uses in a democratic society;

"(d) More generally, the balance which should be established between scientific and technological progress and the intellectual, spiritual, cultural and moral advancement of humanity."

3. Paragraph 18 of the Proclamation of Teheran, adopted by the Teheran Conference on 13 May 1968, reads:^{2/}

"18. While recent scientific discoveries and technological advances have opened vast prospects for economic, social and cultural progress, such developments may nevertheless endanger the rights and freedoms of individuals and will require continuing attention."

4. The General Assembly, on 19 December 1968, adopted resolution 2450 (XXIII) on human rights and scientific and technological developments, which reads as follows:

"The General Assembly,

"Having taken note of paragraph 18 of the Proclamation of Teheran adopted by the International Conference on Human Rights and of resolution XI concerning human rights and scientific and technological developments adopted by the Conference on 12 May 1968,

"Sharing the concern expressed by the Conference that recent scientific discoveries and technological advances, although they open up

^{2/} Ibid., chap. II.

vast prospects for economic, social and cultural progress, may nevertheless endanger the rights and freedoms of individuals and peoples and consequently call for constant attention,

"Endorsing the idea that these problems require thorough and continuous interdisciplinary studies, both national and international, which may serve as a basis for drawing up appropriate standards to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms,

"1. Invites the Secretary-General to undertake, with the assistance, inter alia, of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development and in co-operation with the executive heads of the competent specialized agencies, a study of the problems in connexion with human rights arising from developments in science and technology, in particular from the following standpoints:

"(a) Respect for the privacy of individuals and the integrity and sovereignty of nations in the light of advances in recordings and other techniques;

"(b) Protection of the human personality and its physical and intellectual integrity, in the light of advances in biology, medicine and biochemistry;

"(c) Uses of electronics which may affect the rights of the person and the limits which should be placed on such uses in a democratic society;

"(d) More generally, the balance which should be established between scientific and technological progress and the intellectual, spiritual, cultural and moral advancement of humanity;

"2. Requests the Secretary-General to prepare, on a preliminary basis, a report comprising a summary account of studies already made or in progress on the aforementioned subjects, emanating in particular from governmental and intergovernmental sources, the specialized agencies and the competent non-governmental organizations, and a draft programme of work which might be undertaken in fields in which subsequent surveys would be necessary for the attainment of the objectives of the present resolution;

"3. Requests the Secretary-General to submit the said report to the Commission on Human Rights at its twenty-sixth session for consideration and transmittal, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session."

5. In accordance with paragraph 2 of resolution 2450 (XXIII), the Secretary-General addressed appropriate inquiries to Governments of States Members of the United Nations and States members of the specialized agencies, to the specialized agencies, to the Council of Europe, the League of Arab States, the

Organization of African Unity and the Organization of American States, to various other intergovernmental bodies and to a wide range of non-governmental organizations. Since many relevant studies were known to have emanated from sources other than those specifically mentioned in the resolution, the Secretary-General sought also the co-operation of a number of national academies, institutes of learning and other institutions, and of individual scholars. Further material was collected independently of those inquiries.

6. As a result of the above-mentioned inquiries, material had been received, up to 10 December 1969, from:

- (i) The Governments of Barbados, Belgium, Canada, China, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, Netherlands, Nigeria, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America;
- (ii) The International Labour Organisation (ILO), United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Universal Postal Union (UPU), World Health Organization (WHO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the Council of Europe and the Organization of American States;
- (iii) The following non-governmental organizations in consultative relationship with the Economic and Social Council:

Category I: International Co-operative Alliance; Category II: Battelle Memorial Institute Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (USA), International Association of Democratic Lawyers, International Association of Youth Magistrates, International Astronautic Federation, International Catholic Child Bureau, International Commission of Jurists, International Conference of Catholic Charities, International Council on Social Welfare, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International League for the Rights of Man, Pax Romana, International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs, Soroptimist International Association, World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations; Roster: Council for International Organizations of Medical Sciences, International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies, International Council of Nurses, International Dental Federation, International Federation of Air Line Pilots Associations, International Federation of Senior Police Officers, International Federation of Surgical Colleges, International

International Institute of Administrative Sciences, International Leprosy Association, International Pharmaceutical Federation, International Police Association and World Medical Association;

(iv) A number of other organizations, institutes and individual scholars.

7. At its eleventh session, 31 March-4 April 1969, the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development discussed General Assembly resolution 2450 (XXIII). It offered its assistance to the Secretariat in the work involved and appointed a liaison group of three of its members to maintain contact and provide consultation with the Division of Human Rights.^{3/} At its twelfth session, 24 November-5 December 1969, the Advisory Committee agreed that the liaison group should continue to assist the Secretariat in preparing the present report. It was noted that, when that report was approved, further studies would be undertaken, and the Committee agreed that it would be glad to provide assistance in this work.^{4/}

8. The present document is the preliminary report requested of the Secretary-General by paragraphs 2 and 3 of General Assembly resolution 2450 (XXIII). The headings of chapters I, II, III and V are derived from the wording of subparagraphs 1 (a), (b), (c) and (d), respectively, of resolution 2450 (XXIII). Chapter IV deals with problems in connexion with human rights arising from developments in science and technology, other than those dealt with elsewhere in the report. A final chapter VI concerns the procedure which might be adopted in preparing the study called for in paragraph 1 of resolution 2450 (XXIII).

9. The present report speaks of threats and dangers to human rights arising out of scientific and technological developments, while the later study called for by paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 2450 (XXIII) might also take into account the benefits of such developments, so that their advantages and disadvantages might be assessed in the light of the intellectual, spiritual, cultural and moral advancement of mankind.



^{3/} E/AC.52/L.65, para. 25.

^{4/} E/AC.52/L.82, para. 72.