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HUMAN RIGHTS AND SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Report of the Secretary-General

1. By resolution 2844 (XXVI) of 18 December 1971, the General Assembly decided to consider at its twenty-seventh session the item entitled "Human rights and scientific and technological developments".
2. The General Assembly has before it for its consideration the Secretary-General's preliminary report on human rights and scientific and technological developments (E/CN.4/1028, Add.1-3, Add.3/Corr.1 and Add.4-6) which it requested in paragraph 2 of resolution 2450 (XXIII) of 19 December 1968.
3. In paragraph 1 of that resolution, the Assembly invited 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 recording 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; and (d) more generally, the balance which should be established between scientific and technological progress and the intellectual, spiritual, cultural and moral advancement of humanity.
4. The preliminary report was to comprise 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

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might be undertaken in fields in which subsequent surveys would be necessary for the attainment of the objectives of the present resolution.

5. The preliminary report was originally submitted to the General Assembly at its twenty-fifth session. At that session the Assembly, by resolution 2721 (XXV) of 15 December 1970, requested the Secretary-General to continue to study the problems relating to human rights as they arise from developments in science and technology, as provided in paragraph 1 of resolution 2450 (XXIII); and requested the Commission on Human Rights at its twenty-seventh session to give priority to the examination of the preliminary report (E/CN.4/1028 and Add.1-3, Add.3/Corr.1 and Add.4-5), as supplemented by such further information as might be made available to it, including a preliminary memorandum submitted by the World Health Organization (A/8055/Add.1), and to transmit to the General Assembly, through the Economic and Social Council, its suggestions and recommendations for the attainment of the objectives of General Assembly resolution 2450 (XXIII).

6. The Commission on Human Rights considered the above-mentioned documentation at its twenty-seventh session, together with a working paper by the Secretary-General on the draft programme of work arising out of his preliminary report (E/CN.4/XXVII/CRP.2). A statement relating to this agenda item was submitted by the World Union of Catholic Women's Organizations, a non-governmental organization in consultative relationship with the Economic and Social Council (E/CN.4/NGO/159).

7. Following consideration of the item, the Commission adopted resolution 10 (XXVII) on 18 March 1971. In this resolution, the Commission expressed the view that each State should, individually and through international co-operation with due regard to the principles of inviolability, sovereignty and equality of States, make use of scientific and technological developments to promote the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms as fully as possible; and that problems of protecting these rights and freedoms in the context of scientific and technological progress should be tackled at the national and international levels in accordance with the principles underlying the structure of the State and society, specific economic and social conditions, and cultural tradition.

8. The Commission also recognized the need during the Second United Nations Development Decade to concentrate its attention on the most important and basic problems of protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in the context of scientific and technological progress, and in particular on: (a) protection of human rights in the economic, social and cultural fields in accordance with the structure and resources of States and the scientific and technological level they have reached, as well as protection of the right to work in conditions of the automation and mechanization of production; (b) the use of scientific and technological developments to foster respect for human rights and the legitimate interests of other peoples and respect for generally recognized moral standards and standards of international law; and (c) prevention of the use of scientific and technological achievements to restrict fundamental democratic rights and freedoms.

9. The Commission requested the Secretary-General to continue his study of the consequences, for the observance of human rights, of current developments in science and technology, taking into account also the possibility of using them to improve living conditions and the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. It requested Governments to submit to the Secretary-General any material they might have on problems arising in connexion with the protection of human rights within the context of scientific and technological progress, including information on the problems mentioned above, and on the development of legislation, court decisions and national practice and any projects they had in view in connexion with the matters dealt with in the resolution. It requested the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization, the other specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency to submit to the Commission, through the Secretary-General, a report on the above problems in relation to those human rights which fall within their competence. It requested other intergovernmental organizations, especially regional organizations, to transmit to the Secretary-General their comments and observations on these problems. It also requested the non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council to transmit to the Secretary-General any communications they considered relevant to these problems.

10. The Commission further requested that the Secretary-General, bearing in mind the information received from Governments and in the light of the discussions at the Commission's twenty-seventh session, supplement his studies so as to present a balanced picture of all basic problems arising in connexion with the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in conditions of scientific and technological progress; and submit to the Commission one or more reports, in fields where sufficient documentation and studies are available, which could be used as a basis for exploring the possibility of preparing international instruments designed to strengthen the protection of the human rights proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

11. It also asked the Secretary-General to bring the resolution to the attention of the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and of the Economic and Social Council, in the course of the efforts to ensure the success of the Second Development Decade, and the relevant documents studied by the Commission at its twenty-seventh session.

12. The Commission decided to retain the item on human rights and technological developments as a standing item on its agenda.

13. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2721 (XXV), the Secretary-General is continuing to study the problems relating to human rights as they arise from developments in science and technology, as provided in paragraph 1 of General Assembly resolution 2450 (XXIII), bearing in mind resolution 10 (XXVII) of the Commission on Human Rights and, as far as possible, the views expressed by members of the Commission.

14. In partial implementation of Commission resolution 10 (XXVII), the Secretary-General has started to prepare, in several parts, a preliminary report

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on the impact of recent scientific and technological developments on economic, social and cultural rights. He submitted to the twenty-eighth session of the Commission a preliminary report on the right to food and the right to clothing, as aspects of the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being, as proclaimed in article 25, paragraph 1, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (E/CN.4/1084).

15. The Commission on Human Rights, due to lack of time, decided to postpone consideration of the item entitled "Human rights and scientific and technological developments: report of the Secretary-General" to its twenty-ninth (1973) session. 1/

16. The Secretary-General intends to submit to the Commission's twenty-ninth session further parts of his preliminary report on the impact of recent scientific and technological developments on economic, social and cultural rights. He also hopes to be able to submit the first of his final reports dealing with the topics enumerated in paragraph 1 of Assembly resolution 2450 (XXIII).

17. A seminar on Human Rights and Scientific and Technological Developments was organized by the United Nations Division of Human Rights, in co-operation with the Government of Austria, and held in Vienna, from 19 June to 1 July 1972. The report of the seminar will be issued in document ST/TAO/HR/45.

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1/ Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, Fifty-second session, Supplement No. 7 (E/5113), para. 160.