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URGENT NEED FOR CESSATION OF NUCLEAR AND THERMONUCLEAR  
TESTS AND CONCLUSION OF A TREATY DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE A  
COMPREHENSIVE TEST BAN

Letter dated 17 December 1974 from the Permanent  
Representative of France to the United Nations  
addressed to the Secretary-General

On instructions from my Government, I have the honour to refer to the letter addressed to you on 26 November 1974 by the Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations (A/9884).

That document made, inter alia, the following assertion:

"These explosions are estimated to have committed the Australian population to date to additional radiation doses, due to fresh fission products, which are greater than 10 times the doses incurred by the Australian population from the whole of the 1973 French tests."

The figures provided by the Australian delegation to the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which form the basis of the letter from the Permanent Representative of Australia, do not seem open to doubt, since they come from bodies whose competence is indisputable and are also corroborated by the results of measurements made in other countries in the southern hemisphere.

The French Government wishes to point out, however, that the manner in which these results are presented may give an inaccurate idea of the actual level of the fallout produced by the 1974 French nuclear test series.

The letter of the Permanent Representative of Australia merely points out that the doses from this 1974 test series are 10 times greater than those from the previous series in 1973. The United Nations General Assembly would, it seems, have been in a better position to assess the situation if the comparison had been made not only with the 1973 series but with all previous series and if it had had information on the absolute value of the doses resulting from the 1974 series and on their significance.

Taking the single year 1973 as a point of reference gives an inaccurate picture of the actual situation in 1974, since the fallout resulting from the 1973 test series - and, indeed, that caused by the 1972 series as well - was unusually weak. Granting that the level of milk contamination by iodine 131 observed in Australia in 1974 was higher than it had been in 1973 or 1972, the fact is that it was lower than the levels recorded during the 1966, 1967, 1968, 1970 and 1971 series, as can be seen from the very document submitted to the Scientific Committee.

Furthermore, according to the information supplied by the Australian delegation in the Scientific Committee, the thyroid dose received in 1974 as a result of milk contamination averaged 9 millirads for infants. It should be noted that this level, which applies only in the case of very small children (the dose received by older children and adults was even lower), represents less than 1 per cent (0.6 per cent, to be precise) of the maximum annual dose recommended by the International Commission on Radiological Protection:

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter circulated as an official General Assembly document under agenda item 29, entitled "Urgent need for cessation of nuclear and thermonuclear tests and conclusion of a treaty designed to achieve a comprehensive test ban".

(Signed) Louis de GUIRINGAUD  
Ambassador  
Permanent Representative of France

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