

United Nations  
**GENERAL  
ASSEMBLY**

FOURTEENTH SESSION  
Official Records



**FIRST COMMITTEE, 1049th  
MEETING**

Tuesday, 10 November 1959,  
at 3.10 p.m.

**NEW YORK**

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Chairman: Mr. Franz MATSCH (Austria).

**AGENDA ITEM 68**

**Question of French nuclear tests in the Sahara (A/4183,  
A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1, A/C.1/L.239) (continued)**

**GENERAL DEBATE (continued)**

1. Mr. ORMSBY-GORE (United Kingdom), replying to the Moroccan representative's question (1048th meeting), said that operative paragraph 2 of draft resolution A/C.1/L.239 referred to all views that might be expressed in the course of the debate.
2. Mr. ORTONA (Italy) stressed the contribution to the debate offered by previous speakers, especially the representative of France, Mr. Moch (1043rd meeting), and the representative of Morocco, Mr. Benhima (1043rd meeting). The moderate approach to the problem which they had chosen showed that, in spite of their contrasting points of view, a ground for mutual understanding could be sought. That was the earnest hope of the Italian delegation with regard to the complex issue on which France and Morocco, two countries with which Italy had close ties, held opposing points of view. The three main issues raised thus far were, first whether the stage reached in the negotiations on disarmament or on the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests had a bearing on nuclear testing by Powers not belonging to the "nuclear club"; secondly, whether France had the right to carry out nuclear tests; and thirdly, whether such tests posed a threat to human safety and health.
3. The question under discussion was one of five agenda items relating to disarmament and concerned only French nuclear tests in the Sahara; the Moroccan representative had in effect recognized its limited scope by dealing mainly with the geographical and scientific aspects of the matter and by acknowledging France's right to develop nuclear weapons. The world was following with intense interest the current Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests, and the question that should be examined was whether, in those circumstances, any country should be permitted to conduct tests. That question, however, pertained to broader political issues which should be discussed under the relevant agenda items and by other disarmament bodies, such as the ten-Power disarmament committee.
4. The question whether France had the right to become a nuclear Power was also not pertinent to the present discussion; it should be discussed in connexion

with general disarmament, which must exclude discrimination against or in favour of individual countries. His delegation was pleased that the United Kingdom representative had implicitly endorsed the principle of non-discrimination. Italy also regarded the capacity to conduct a nuclear test as a demonstration of scientific progress and was certain that France recognized its responsibility for protecting other peoples against the potential hazards involved. With regard to the contention that France was engaged in a mere search for prestige or self-enhancement or something similar, the United Nations could do no more than ask that country to join in nuclear disarmament and the discontinuance of testing, as it had asked the existing nuclear Powers; his delegation hoped that the current Geneva talks would lead to an early agreement with which all States would associate themselves.

5. The essence of the question before the Committee was whether the projected French nuclear test threatened human safety and health. If it did, the United Nations would have to take steps to prevent it from being carried out. It was, indeed, the Moroccan Government's fear on that score which has caused the question of the French nuclear test to be placed on the Committee's agenda as a separate item. The Italian Government was far from underestimating or showing a lack of sympathy for the concern of its African friends in that respect. The close ties between Italy and Africa, stemming from historical associations and geographical position, were sound reasons for his Government's keen and sincere interest in the matter. Because of its desire to obtain the assurance that the projected nuclear test would cause no harm to the Italian people or to the African countries with which it had long had close relations, his Government had approached the French Government at the highest possible level for scientific and technical information bearing on the question; the French Government had proved most co-operative and had made it apparent that it would not proceed with the proposed test if there was any possibility that harm would result. The statements made by the representatives of France, the United Kingdom (1044 and 1048th meetings) and the United States (1046th meeting) in the Committee had also been reassuring on that point.

6. His delegation felt that draft resolution A/C.1/L.239, of which it was a sponsor, took an objective approach to the matter under discussion; he hoped that it would win the Committee's support.

7. Sir Claude COREA (Ceylon) doubted whether the hope expressed by the Italian representative that all States—and that implied France as well—would associate themselves in an eventual agreement on the cessation of nuclear weapons tests was compatible, to say the least, with the statement made earlier by the representative of France. Mr. Moch had given the clear impression that France would not consent to accede to any agreement which might be reached on

the banning of nuclear tests until a scheme for nuclear disarmament had been agreed upon by all the nuclear Powers. There was a considerable difference between signing an agreement to prohibit nuclear tests and an agreement on complete nuclear disarmament. The latter involved, not only the cessation of production of nuclear weapons, but also the destruction of nuclear stockpiles.

8. The representative of Italy had thus raised an extremely important question which was of interest also to the delegation of Ceylon. Ceylon was inclined to believe that the position originally stated by the French representative was the true one, because it was hard to believe that France would risk encountering the antagonism of the rest of the world unless some very important considerations were involved. Apart from the question of France's prestige and security, there was reason to believe that the proposal to conduct the Sahara test was prompted by a desire to become an equal of the other nuclear Powers. However, in order to achieve that ambition, France could not stop short at the testing of an ordinary atomic bomb, but would have to continue testing until it was able to produce a thermo-nuclear weapon with at least the explosive power of those possessed by either the United States or the Soviet Union. There was therefore good reason to suppose that, even if an agreement were reached on the subject of tests, France would not be willing to stop its own experiments after the Sahara tests. In view of those considerations a clarification from the French representative was very desirable.

9. As for the draft resolution submitted by Italy and the United Kingdom (A/C.1/L.239), Ceylon had no objection to the text except that it seemed to serve no useful purpose. If the operative part of that draft could be incorporated in the twenty-two-Power draft (A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1), then it would be acceptable. Alternatively, an additional clause could be inserted in the two-Power draft, requesting France to refrain from conducting its nuclear tests. The United Kingdom and Italian delegations might consider that possibility in the light of the views expressed in the Committee.

10. The representative of the United Kingdom had criticized (1048th meeting) the sponsors of the twenty-two-Power draft resolution for putting forward what he called a negative proposal. The use of the term "negative" would seem to imply that the sponsors had failed to put forward a positive proposal regarding disarmament or the prohibition of nuclear tests. Yet that was far from being the case, for the sponsors were directing attention to the proposed nuclear tests by France and had already contributed positively by co-sponsoring and supporting the draft resolution that had been unanimously adopted (1042nd meeting) on the subject of disarmament. Since disarmament included nuclear weapons, the contribution must be considered positive.

11. The United Kingdom representative had also objected to the twenty-two-Power draft on the grounds that it was the first draft resolution in which any nuclear Power, or country desiring to become such, was specifically named and singled out for special reference. Unfortunately, the circumstances required that France should be mentioned by name. It was doubtful whether the omission of any reference to France would have helped, since the sponsors had already joined in a general resolution calling for disarmament and most of them would support a subsequent

resolution calling for a general cessation of nuclear tests. In the meantime, however, those who wished to make that positive contribution to disarmament were faced with a situation in which one country proposed to conduct a nuclear test in the immediate future. If the name of France were omitted from the text, it would still be quite clear that the country referred to was France, but the name had to be mentioned because of the circumstances. And, although in past resolutions on the subject no country had been specifically mentioned, it had been generally known at the time that nuclear tests were being conducted either by the United States, the Soviet Union or the United Kingdom. Since there had been no need to make specific mention of a given country, the resolutions urging all countries to abolish nuclear tests had been couched in general terms.

12. As for the main question under discussion, the French proposal to conduct nuclear tests seemed to be based on two grounds which had been stated very clearly by the representative of France. First, it was stated that the proposed explosion would result in no danger whatsoever to any person. Secondly, whether there was a danger or not, it was imperative at the present juncture for France to take steps to protect its own security and to maintain its own prestige. It was, of course, a legitimate aspiration for any country to seek to enhance its prestige, provided that it did so in accordance with a generally accepted ethical code. As France had rightly pointed out, it had long ago been in a position to produce an atomic bomb, but had refrained from doing so in the interests of world peace and in conformity with its obligations under the Charter of the United Nations. As to whether France had the right to carry out its present proposal, the delegation of Ceylon had no hesitation in maintaining that, as a sovereign Power, France had an absolute right to manufacture an atomic bomb.

13. Apart from that abstract consideration, however, and in addition to the questions of France's prestige and security, there was the overriding question whether a further atomic explosion would endanger the health of the peoples of the world.

14. In the course of his statement, the representative of France had quoted a friend of France as saying that, although France might increase its power by the possession of the atomic bomb, it would lose the friendship of the peoples of Africa. Mr. Moch had expressed the view, however, that France's friends would return to it when they realized that their fears had proved groundless. France might do well to pay greater heed to that warning, as people in Africa and other parts of the world were far less likely to be convinced by scientific arguments demonstrating that the effects of radio-active fall-out would be negligible than by the generally held belief that nuclear bombs were a danger to the health of present or future generations. In the discussions it had been stressed that the small amount of radio-active fall-out involved would present little danger to the present generation, but little consideration had been given to the possible future consequences of delayed fall-out. Furthermore, what the people of Africa would remember would be the fact that a European Power had chosen an African territory in which to explode a bomb that might have dangerous consequences to the people of that territory. That psychological aspect of the matter could not be ignored.

15. With regard to the possible dangers to health resulting from the test, the representative of France had given a number of figures seeking to prove that the total amount of fall-out from the test would be infinitesimal compared with the radio-activity present in the atmosphere and that no immediate danger to human health would result. That conclusion was harder to accept in view of the opinion given by the members of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which contradicted the views of the French scientists quoted by Mr. Moch. There was also the fact that twenty-seven French scientists, all of whom held important positions in France, had submitted a petition urging the Government of France to desist from holding the atomic test as it would endanger human health. Furthermore, on 13 January 1958 a petition had been presented to the United Nations, signed by more than 9,000 scientists representing some fifty countries and including at least thirty-seven Nobel Prize winners, pointing out the dangers that each added amount of radiation could cause to future generations and asking that immediate action should be taken to bring about an international agreement to stop the testing of all nuclear weapons. It would thus seem that even if the total amount of radio-activity to which human beings were exposed might not be sufficient to endanger human health at present, the health of future generations would be affected.

16. However, even assuming, for the purpose of argument, that no such danger existed, there remained the question of France's prestige and security. The French representative had stated that, in the present insecurity created by the arms race, each State had the right and each Government the duty to ensure the protection of its country. He had gone on to ask whether, in that insecure world, France should remain without modern weapons. Ordinarily the answer should be left to France, as a sovereign country. But the question of prestige was also involved. France, one of the few countries sufficiently advanced to utilize atomic energy for peaceful purposes, should consider its prestige in the field of nuclear energy adequate. However, it wanted to utilize its atomic energy for military purposes. The real purpose underlying that aspiration had been stated by the French Prime Minister when he had said on 16 August 1959 that France must have the power to make itself heard and understood, if it was to avoid being crushed by agreements between the very great Powers. While that might be a legitimate desire, it none the less implied that France contemplated the use of military nuclear power as a threat to be used against the other nuclear Powers to induce them to consult France on matters of policy. If that were so, the situation might become extremely dangerous because, in certain circumstances, France could make use of its nuclear power. Alternatively, France might merely be contemplating using its nuclear power as a deterrent against attack, but it was doubtful whether the possession of one nuclear weapon could serve as a deterrent.

17. Assuming, therefore, that France was entitled to take the proposed step in order to secure its own safety and enhance its prestige, the question remained whether there were any other reasons why it should not conduct the tests. The answer was simple. If France had used its skill and resources to produce an atomic bomb in 1958, when the other great Powers were exploding destructive weapons all over the world, it

would have incurred no criticism. Yet, at that time it had showed a spirit of magnanimity and self-sacrifice. Might it not gain even greater prestige in the eyes of the world if it continued to refrain from conducting nuclear tests? In spite of its statement that it would not join in an agreement to prohibit tests unless there were total nuclear disarmament, France might still be persuaded to join such an agreement and the encouraging news from Geneva gave reason to hope that such an agreement might be achieved in the near future. It would be better for France to await the completion of the discussions on tests. If no agreement was reached, France could join the other countries that would conduct tests.

18. Thus, France should consider whether, after waiting for ten years, it would be right to jeopardize the possibility of an agreement at the present time. It might also consider the possible consequences of conducting an explosion at a time when the three nuclear Powers had voluntarily undertaken to suspend nuclear tests and were likely to extend that undertaking for a further period. Incidentally, the representative of the Soviet Union had clearly stated (1047th meeting) that his country would not resume its tests unless a Western Power started to test atomic bombs. It was earnestly to be hoped that the Soviet Union, despite any action by France or any other European country, would continue to refrain from tests. If it did not, any agreement on the cessation of tests would become impossible.

19. Speaking as a friend of France, Ceylon asked France not to forgo its right to defend itself or to maintain its prestige, but merely to allow the present negotiations to succeed. It would have nothing to lose from such restraint and would give the rest of the world a considerable amount of reassurance.

20. Mr. URQUIA (El Salvador) said that the question of the projected French nuclear test, though related to the other disarmament items on the Committee's agenda, was a specific item which must not be confused with them; it was on the agenda because of the concern felt by numerous Asian and African countries over the danger which the French test might pose to human life and health. While his delegation had no reason to cast doubt on the assurances offered on that score by the French representative, it could not ignore the fears aroused among Asian and African peoples by a phenomenon about which much was still unknown. It fully recognized that France was motivated by considerations of national pride and security in its desire to become a nuclear Power with the right to participate in all negotiations concerning nuclear weapons. However, at a time when vigorous steps were being taken towards disarmament, the prevention of the wider dissemination of nuclear weapons and the discontinuance of nuclear weapons tests, France would gain more in terms of prestige if it desisted from its intention to hold a nuclear test in the Sahara.

21. Mr. BUDO (Albania) said that the debate had demonstrated that the proposed French test was badly timed, dangerous and prejudicial to African and world interests. It constituted a direct and serious threat to the population in the test area, to the neighbouring African peoples and to certain Mediterranean countries, including Albania. The reaction of the Arab countries, reflected in a Syrian newspaper, was that the nomadic tribes in Algeria would be exterminated. In the view of the European Federation against Atomic

Armaments, it would be especially dangerous because of the lack of rain in the area to dilute the radio-active substances present in fall-out. Moreover, the spread of radio-active fall-out was so irregular that Italian experts feared that the radio-activity released by the French bomb might be felt in Sicily. Previous speakers, citing reputable scientific opinion including that of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, had stressed the disastrous consequences of the test for the health and safety of present and future generations. Albania had not been convinced by the French arguments; there was no such thing as a "clean" bomb; however weak and small the weapon, it would have adverse effects; the consequences of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima were still being manifested.

22. Albania favoured a permanent and total cessation of nuclear weapons testing by all States. It was dismayed to find that France, despite strong opposition to the test from Governments, scientists and various organizations, was determined to enter the nuclear arms race, the more so as the prospects for agreement among the three nuclear Powers to end all tests had never been more favourable. France's attitude struck a discordant note in the new international atmosphere which had resulted from the meeting of the Soviet and United States Heads of Government, the Soviet proposal for general and complete disarmament and the unanimous adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution on the question, the progress at the Geneva Conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear weapons Tests and the preparations for a summit meeting. That atmosphere was being fostered by the USSR's policy of peace, its efforts to improve international relations, its internal achievements, its scientific triumphs and the efforts of the other socialist countries. Indeed, responsible circles in the Western world appeared to be making a more realistic appraisal of the power relationships between the two existing ideological systems and to have recognized the risks involved in nuclear war.

23. France should use its influence as a great Power to contribute to the solution of international differences. It did not need the atomic bomb for its defence or its security. No country was threatening France and its security could hardly be increased by the explosion of a small atomic bomb in a world where far more powerful nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons had already been perfected. Explosion of the bomb could only harm French prestige, particularly in Africa. France would demonstrate its greatness by joining in the efforts to stop nuclear testing, to eliminate nuclear weapons from all armaments and to use atomic energy exclusively for peaceful purposes. At a time when intercontinental and interplanetary missiles had been developed and cosmic space had been penetrated, France must recognize that peaceful coexistence was essential. For all those reasons, Albania would vote for the draft resolution submitted by the Asian and African States (A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1).

24. Mr. SHAHA (Nepal) expressed keen regret that France had failed to respond favourably to the diplomatic representations made by the African States in connexion with its plan to explode an atomic bomb in the Sahara. The French test differed basically from previous tests carried out by the nuclear Powers: those tests had been made in the territory of the respective States and in the midst of their respective

populations. The French test site was situated in a contested area, the borders of which were being drawn for the first time in accordance with the wishes of the inhabitants and to which there were outstanding territorial claims. The explosion would affect the health and safety of people in dependent territories for which the United Nations had special responsibility. However small the risk, it should not be taken without the consent of those people. Moreover, the report of the Scientific Committee indicated that the risk might be considerable. The success of precautionary measures was at best doubtful.

25. The French test might not only duplicate previous tests, but might prejudice the outcome of the Geneva negotiations on a suspension of tests. France's insistence on testing nuclear weapons so long as there was no agreement on total nuclear disarmament implied that any agreement which might be reached at Geneva would not be regarded as binding on France. It was therefore not morally justifiable. The greatness of France was an established fact; there was no need to demonstrate it by detonating an atomic bomb.

26. Nepal had co-sponsored the draft resolution calling upon France to abandon the proposed test in recognition of prevailing world opinion and in view of the moral implications of the test. The draft resolution submitted by Italy and the United Kingdom conflicted with that proposal in that it took for granted that France was already a nuclear Power; the question of France's association with the arrangements to be worked out for a cessation of nuclear tests would not arise until France had become a nuclear Power. Nepal would therefore vote against that draft resolution.

27. Mr. PACHACHI (Iraq) emphasized the urgency of the question before the Committee and recalled that Morocco had had no recourse but to bring it to the United Nations (A/4183) when all friendly efforts through diplomatic channels to dissuade France from its dangerous purpose had been scornfully disregarded.

28. It was evident that scientific opinion throughout the world, including that of French scientists, was sharply divided regarding the effects of radio-active fall-out on present and future generations. At the thirteenth session of the General Assembly (758th plenary meeting) the French representative himself had recognized that there were hazards, and so long as doubts persisted regarding their scope and intensity, it was wiser to err on the side of caution. The African States were fully justified in fearing the effects of an explosion and in endeavouring to stop it.

29. Moreover, the issues raised by the proposed French test were not merely scientific and geographical. While there was certainly a danger that the natural resources in the Reggane area might be contaminated, the moral implications of the French test were even more disconcerting: France was planning to join the "nuclear club" at a time when a voluntary temporary suspension of testing had been agreed upon and serious efforts were being made to work out a permanent and workable system of general and complete disarmament. Indeed, the resolution unanimously adopted by the Committee (1042nd meeting) had called upon Governments to make every effort to achieve a solution of the problem of disarmament, and during the debate on the item nearly every speaker had expressed satisfaction regarding the progress achieved in the Geneva talks on the cessation of tests and general agreement on the

broader objective of complete disarmament. The French representative had conceded that only a few pounds of nuclear material would destroy millions of people and prohibit life for thousands of miles. The New Zealand representative had expressed the hope that, pending agreement on a permanent cessation of tests, other States would refrain from tests in recognition of world public opinion (1040th meeting). Yet France argued that the test was necessary until general and complete disarmament had been achieved. The General Assembly had rejected that argument; even the three nuclear Powers had agreed that a treaty ending tests could be concluded before the ultimate objective of disarmament was achieved. France's intention of disturbing the prevailing atmosphere of understanding might seriously hinder the work of the ten-Power disarmament committee. Moreover, if other countries followed the French example and sought to become atomic Powers, the danger of nuclear war would be greatly increased.

30. The French argument in support of the proposed test was based on contradictory assumptions. If, as Mr. Moch had asserted, the intention was to explode a relatively small atomic bomb, it was difficult to understand the value of such a limited experiment to French defence. The demonstrated uselessness of the bomb as an effective defence weapon reduced the test to an empty gesture designed to show the world that France was as capable of producing atomic weapons as the other three nuclear Powers. If, as the French representative had asserted, the right of France or of any other country to possess atomic weapons was not to be called into question, the disarmament discussions in the General Assembly had been and would be utterly futile. The emergence of another nuclear Power in the world struck at the very core of the disarmament problem and was of immediate and urgent concern to the United Nations. The sense of inequality which France had been experiencing with regard to the other great Powers and which had led it to insist on exploding an atomic bomb was hardly worthy of a people renowned for its realism and logic.

31. Iraq hoped that France would refrain from carrying out the proposed test in recognition of the fact that African and world good will far outweighed any illusory security it might derive from possession of an atomic bomb. His delegation had therefore co-sponsored the twenty-two-Power draft resolution (A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1).

32. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco), commenting on draft resolution A/C.1/L.239, pointed out that, in effect, it asked the Committee to endorse the French intention to explode an atomic bomb in the Sahara and to agree that France should go ahead with the proposed test. The second and third paragraphs of the preamble appeared to juxtapose the views expressed by the African States and the reassurances given by the French representative. In actual fact, most of the opposition expressed to the bomb test had come from non-African States and all the views expressed had been based on scientific testimony and specifically documented. The United Kingdom representative, in his first statement (1044th meeting), had not refuted that evidence; he had merely recounted his country's experience in nuclear testing. The "reassurances" given by the French representative had not convinced the sponsors of the Asian-African draft resolution (A/C.1/L.238 and Add.1); they were no more than evaluations by French experts strengthened by the personal convictions of Mr. Moch. He would ask the United Kingdom representative whether public opinion in his country, which had consistently been opposed to nuclear armament, had been reassured by France. The reference to General Assembly resolution 1252 (XIII) in the last paragraph of the preamble did not appear particularly relevant when the Assembly had itself decided to discuss the French nuclear test separately from the questions of the suspension of nuclear tests and general and complete disarmament.

33. It was difficult to see how the United Kingdom, which had subscribed to a draft clause of the prospective agreement on the cessation of nuclear tests under which the parties pledged themselves to prohibit and prevent nuclear explosions in all areas under their control or jurisdiction and not to undertake or encourage further tests anywhere in the world, could reconcile the two-Power draft resolution with its undertaking at Geneva. The decisions already reached by the great Powers at Geneva were in clear contradiction with a request to all States to rely on French reassurances and approve the explosion of a test bomb in the Sahara. Unless that contradiction could be resolved, Morocco felt entitled to be sceptical of the true motives of the United Kingdom. The draft resolution calling upon France to refrain from carrying out the proposed test was a positive action and not, as the United Kingdom representative had asserted, one that would have a negative effect. Morocco would continue to support it and would vote against draft resolution A/C.1/L.239.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.