



UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/3614/Add.1
26 August 1957

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Twelfth session

PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE TWELFTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL
ASSEMBLY: ITEM PROPOSED BY CZECHOSLOVAKIA

EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION

Letter dated 26 August 1957 from the Permanent Representative
of Czechoslovakia to the United Nations, addressed to the
Secretary-General

New York, 26 August 1957

I have the honour to submit in accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly the explanatory memorandum to the item "Effects of atomic radiation" proposed for inclusion in the agenda of the twelfth session of the General Assembly by the Czechoslovak Government.^{1/}

(Signed) Josef ULLRICH
Permanent Representative of Czechoslovakia
to the United Nations

^{1/} See A/3614.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Developments in the use of nuclear energy have in the past years resulted in a constant increase in the levels of radioactive radiation on a global scale. This is a cause of deep anxiety to world public opinion.

A number of scientific institutions and prominent representatives of science have stressed the dangers involved and warned the world of the harmful effects of atomic radiation on the health of mankind. Nor is this a danger affecting only geographically or politically limited areas, it is a danger affecting humanity as a whole. This menace is the more serious since, even if immediate measures were taken, the level of radioactivity will inevitably continue to increase in the years to come. Nuclear test explosions have as a consequence the contamination of the upper strata of the atmosphere with radioactive products. This radioactivity condenses on dust particles of varying sizes which settle to the earth's surface at a varying speed of descent in relation to the effects of gravitation. The velocity of radioactive deposits is estimated at 10 to 20 per cent per year.

The movement of air currents scatters the radioactive particles over all parts of the globe. The hazard of radioactive fall-out thus affects the population of all States which have no protection against the penetration of the air currents carrying radioactive particles and thereby also against the inevitable increase of radioactive activity in the areas subject to their sovereignty. Even if science is as yet engaged in a study of the relations between levels of radiation and the extent of the hazard, a number of authoritative experts consider the present level of radiation as dangerous.

It is contrary to the tradition of scientific progress to augment the risk of a harmful agent if the extent of its effects are not as yet fully known. Nor can an estimate of this risk based on values assessed today determine the exact degree of the future hazard. An incomplete knowledge of this risk must in no case permit of an irresponsible gamble with the future of the human race.

The potential hazard of the harmful effects of atomic radiation on the health of mankind, and in particular on the health of the future generations, is primarily that of the genetic injuries whose effects may become manifest

/...

only in the generations to come. It is universally recognized today that, from the genetical point of view, there is no tolerable dose and that thus every increase in the amount of radioactivity cumulates genetic mutations which are essentially always harmful. The statements of many outstanding scientists, especially of geneticists, place particular emphasis on precisely this hazard. Moreover, medical experience (for instance with the use of natural radioactive elements) clearly shows that even a small amount of radioactivity can endanger man's life by the growth of malignant tumours.

These consequences also may become manifest only over a very long latent period (lasting for decades) so that the absence of similar cases at the present time cannot in itself justify an attitude of unconcern.

This risk has given rise to the growing imperative and justified demand of the nations that immediate steps be taken which would prevent the possible serious consequences of the harmful effects of atomic radiation on the health of mankind. The same objective is sought in the declarations of prominent scientists and of scientific institutions affirming that atomic radiation constitutes a serious danger to the health of the human race and in the statements made in this connexion by a number of outstanding representatives of public life in different countries.

Recognizing the importance of the question of the effects of atomic radiation, the tenth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization established, by its resolution 913 (X), the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and, inter alia, requested the Committee to include in its report information on the effects of atomic radiation upon man and his environment. The Committee is to submit the report on the results of its work only to the thirteenth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization. It would therefore serve a highly useful purpose if the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation and the respective specialized agencies would continue to give intensive study within the sphere of their competence to the question of the effects of atomic radiation, in particular on man and his environment, and if consideration were given to the possibility of convening a broad scientific conference on the effects of atomic

radiation which would serve as a forum where men of science would state their views on the issues related to this problem.

The United Nations Organization cannot remain inactive in the face of the continued and growing hazard of radioactive radiation. It would therefore be appropriate and opportune if the United Nations Organization were to take immediate steps capable of preventing any further increase in the levels of radioactive radiation.
