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EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION

Report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation

1. The United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation 1/ held its thirty-fourth session at the Vienna International Centre from 10 to 14 June 1985. Mr. T. Kumatori (Japan), Mr. A. Kaul (Federal Republic of Germany) and Mr. A. Hidayatalla (Sudan) served as Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur, respectively.
2. The Committee took note of General Assembly resolution 39/94 of 14 December 1984, by which, inter alia, the Assembly requested the Committee to continue its work, endorsed its future programme of activity and requested the Committee to continue its reviews of important problems in the field of radiation.
3. During a simple ceremony at the opening meeting, the Committee commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of its foundation by the General Assembly. On that occasion Mr. M. Allaf, Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna read a special message from the Secretary-General (see annex) and Mr. M. K. Tolba, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) delivered an address in which he acknowledged the achievements of the Committee and made suggestions for future actions. Sir Edward Pochin, a former member of the Committee, highlighted the active and innovative role of the Committee over the past 30 years in assessing radiation doses, effects and risk for the information of the General Assembly and the benefit of the international scientific community.
4. Technical discussions that occupied most of the session were based on 10 scientific documents prepared in the Secretariat, which dealt with the following topics. In the field of physics, natural radiation sources including those which

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are technologically modified; exposures from nuclear explosions and from the production of nuclear weapon materials; current exposures received globally from the production of nuclear power and the predicted radiological impact of the nuclear fuel cycle up to the year 2050; medical irradiation. In the field of biology, radiation-induced cancer in man; biological effects of pre-natal irradiation; early effects of high radiation doses on man; scientific uncertainties associated with the assessment of radiation risk per unit dose, mostly somatic. Finally, a special group in genetics discussed a document dealing with various current topics related to the general field of hereditary effects of radiation.

5. The scientific discussions aimed at improving the content of the documents which will constitute the background material for future reports of the Committee to the General Assembly. Considering the state of advancement of the scientific material already prepared, the Committee made plans to publish in 1986 a report dealing essentially with some somatic and hereditary effects of ionizing radiation. The rest of the material under study will be released at a later date, probably in 1988.

6. The Committee expressed its appreciation for the support given to its activities by UNEP and expressed its satisfaction at the high level of co-operation achieved with scientific organizations such as the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization.

7. The Committee renewed its call to all Member States, the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system and other scientific international and national bodies, to make available information on the subjects mentioned above because the quality and completeness of the Committee's reports critically depend on the availability of such information.

8. The Committee decided to hold its thirty-fifth session at the Vienna International Centre from 14 to 18 April 1986.

Notes

1/ The terms of reference of the Committee, which was established by the General Assembly at its tenth session in 1955, are set out in resolution 913 (X). It was originally composed of the following Member States: Argentina, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, India, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America. By resolution 3154 C (XXVIII), the General Assembly decided to increase the Committee's membership by up to five additional members, and the following Member States were appointed by the President of the Assembly in consultation with the Chairmen of the regional groups: Germany, Federal Republic of, Indonesia, Peru, Poland and Sudan.

ANNEX

Message from the Secretary-General

It is indeed a pleasure for me to greet today the members of the Scientific Committee which, for the last 30 years, has fulfilled with great effectiveness and little fanfare the important mandate entrusted to it by the General Assembly in 1955.

While the nature of the mandate of the Committee is essentially a scientific, even a technical one, it has always had important political ramifications. For example, it was the Committee's findings that, between 1955 and 1962, provided the international community with facts, figures and assessments so necessary for the drafting and the adoption of the partial Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty. Moreover, once the Treaty had come into force, the continuation of the Committee's work demonstrated in unambiguous terms the instrument's effectiveness in reducing human exposure to ionizing radiation, thus showing how a clearly politically-motivated act can have immediate and positive repercussions for human life and health. Some of the illustrations in the Committee's 1982 report to the General Assembly can also be seen in this light.

There is no doubt that a Committee such as yours can play a very positive and constructive role in other areas of environmental protection. There is a clear need for high-grade scientific findings which would form the basis for international agreements as effective as the Test-Ban Treaty.

One instance that springs to mind is the formulation of internationally-agreed constraints on the emission of noxious substances. It is my hope that we can begin soon to measure greater progress in this important field.

I am certain that I echo the feelings of the international community when I pay tribute to the Committee for three decades of creative and dispassionate service to the cause of scientific truth and, ultimately, to the promotion of international peace and security. May I add my own good wishes for a successful outcome to your deliberations.
