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EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION

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

1. By resolution 3063 (XXVIII) of 13 November 1973, the General Assembly, inter alia, requested the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation 1/ to meet as soon as possible in order to make a study of the most recent documents which had been or might shortly be transmitted to the Secretariat and to update, with a view to their resubmission to the Assembly, at its current session, the conclusions contained in the Committee's latest report. 2/
2. The Committee accordingly held a special session at Headquarters on 26 and 27 November under the chairmanship of Professor Luiz R. Caldas (Brazil). Dr. J. B. T. Aten (Belgium) and Dr. K. Edvarson (Sweden) served as Vice-Chairman and Rapporteur, respectively. In the course of that session, the Committee considered the information that it had received or that had otherwise become available to it since the adoption of its latest report to the General Assembly.
3. In the light of the third preambular paragraph of resolution 3063 (XXVIII) and in view of the fact that underground and atmospheric nuclear tests had been reported as having been carried out in the northern hemisphere, and atmospheric tests in the southern hemisphere, in both 1972 and 1973, the Committee gave particular attention to radio-active contamination of the environment by all nuclear tests, including those carried out between the end of 1970 and the time of

1/ The Scientific Committee was established by the General Assembly at its tenth session in 1955. Its terms of reference are set out in resolution 913 (X). It is 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.

2/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Twenty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 25 (A/8725 and Corr.1).

the Committee's session. However, while most of the data on levels of radio-activity collected in 1972 were available, those relating to 1973 were more limited, so that the assessment of the 1973 levels can only be considered as preliminary.

4. The Committee noted that the estimates of the total doses to the world population to be received by the year 2000 from such long-lived radio-nuclides as strontium-90 and caesium-137 that had been given by the Committee in its latest report did not appear to require revision on the basis of the data available as at 1 January 1973. This is because the estimated increases in the doses are smaller than the uncertainties in the estimates of the total doses. The amounts of strontium-90 and caesium-137 released in the environment by nuclear tests carried out in 1971 and 1972 added slightly to the totals reported in the latest report of the Committee. While the additions of radio-activity were greater in the southern hemisphere, the total amounts produced by all tests carried out up to the end of 1972 remain much higher in the northern hemisphere. ^{3/} The resulting additions to the total doses are small in the southern hemisphere and even smaller in the northern hemisphere. However, since the population of the northern hemisphere is much larger than that of the southern hemisphere, the contribution to the world population dose of these additions comes mainly from the exposures of the population of the northern hemisphere.

5. The Committee further noted that in 1972 and 1973 the short-lived radio-nuclide iodine-131 was detected for a few weeks at a number of sites in both hemispheres. In 1973 the levels, and the corresponding thyroid doses, were generally of the same magnitude as in 1972. In both years and in both hemispheres, the levels and thyroid doses were equal to or lower than those observed in the southern hemisphere in 1970 and 1971, which were referred to in the latest report of the Committee.

6. Owing to the very short period of time available to the Committee for the preparation of the special session and to the paucity of data, the Committee was unable to attempt a broader review of information, but expressed the intention of planning at its twenty-third session, to be held in October 1974, the continuation of its work of review and assessment of levels, effects and risks of radiation from all sources.

^{3/} It might be noted here that a principal contribution to the total amounts of strontium-90 and caesium-137 present in the southern hemisphere is from transfer of material released by tests carried out in the northern hemisphere.