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**SPECIAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE, 755th
MEETING**



Wednesday, 13 October 1971,
at 3.15 p.m.

NEW YORK

Chairman: Mr. Cornelius C. CREMIN (Ireland).

AGENDA ITEM 36

**Effects of atomic radiation: report of the United Nations
Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation
(A/8334, A/SPC/L.203)**

1. Mr. BERNSTROM (Sweden), on behalf of the sponsors, introduced draft resolution A/SPC/L.203, drawing the Committee's attention in particular to operative paragraphs 5, 6 and 8. He also observed that it was important that the report prepared by the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation for the twenty-seventh session of the General Assembly, together with its scientific annexes, should be published early enough to give the representatives of the various countries time to study it.

2. Contrary to its usual practice, the Scientific Committee would submit its next report to the General Assembly without scientific annexes; the annexes must be published simultaneously with the submission of the report to the Assembly, however.

3. His Government considered the atmospheric nuclear tests conducted in 1971 a matter of grave concern and was opposed to any nuclear tests in any environment. Sweden hoped that nuclear tests would be halted and that the work of the Disarmament Commission as well as the First Committee of the General Assembly would bring about an agreement prohibiting all nuclear tests.

4. Mr. DE SOUZA E SILVA (Brazil) pointed out that operative paragraph 8 of draft resolution A/SPC/L.203 somewhat illogically commended the Scientific Committee for a basic paper that had not yet been circulated. He therefore proposed to the 17 sponsors of the draft resolution that the words "in particular for the basic paper" in operative paragraph 8 should be replaced with the words "and takes note in particular of the basic paper".

5. Mrs. O'DONNELL (United States of America) welcomed the efforts of the Scientific Committee and the contributions made by its members and secretary but wondered whether it should consider reporting to the General Assembly only when it was able to present a complete scientific report. Such an approach would shorten the agenda of the Assembly without interfering with the work of the Scientific Committee or reducing its usefulness to the various States. If the Special Political Committee agreed, that suggestion could be submitted to the Scientific Committee.

6. Mr. COTTON (New Zealand) said that the question under consideration was not one which could be disposed of once and for all. With regard to the suggestion just made by the United States of America, he pointed out that the effects of atomic radiation were not lessening and that it was therefore reassuring to know that in addition to the more substantive reports it prepared every two, three or four years, the Scientific Committee was also preparing annual reports in which it could, whenever necessary, draw attention to any danger that had been identified. Moreover, consideration of that report gave Member States an opportunity to express their concern at the avoidable risks of nuclear tests. His Government was therefore unable to support the suggestion made by the United States.

7. New Zealand was providing and would continue to provide the Scientific Committee with information on radio-activity caused by the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and radio-isotopes. New Zealand had a monitoring programme directly related to the nuclear tests conducted by France in the South Pacific. Observations indicated that the fall-out in 1970 and 1971 had been much the same as in previous years when France had conducted tests in the same area. Although the fall-out had remained well below the reference levels set by the New Zealand National Radiation Laboratory, the level of ionizing radiation would be very much lower without the nuclear tests conducted by France and the People's Republic of China. Furthermore, whatever the risks resulting from radiation from those tests might be, they were not offset by any benefit to the peoples of the Pacific Islands and New Zealand.

8. He welcomed the fact that France had recently submitted reports to the Scientific Committee, which, he hoped, would consider them at its March 1972 session. He also recalled that following a meeting in August 1971 of representatives of the Cook Islands, Fiji, Nauru, Tonga, Western Samoa, Australia and New Zealand, an appeal had been addressed to the French Government to cease conducting nuclear tests in the Pacific. The French Government's decision to cancel the remaining tests scheduled for 1971 had followed that protest and the protests from some South American States. However, what New Zealanders and Pacific Islanders, as well as the majority of the world's people wanted to hear was that nuclear tests had been permanently discontinued, and there would be no lessening of New Zealand's opposition to all testing programmes without an assurance to that effect. In conclusion, he invited the Special Political Committee to adopt the draft resolution unanimously.

9. Mr. AKATANI (Japan) felt that the Scientific Committee had contributed much to the available scientific knowledge on the level of radio-active contamination and

the possible adverse effects of such contamination on the human organism. His delegation regretted that some atmospheric nuclear explosions had taken place during the course of the past year. On the other hand, it noted that attention was increasingly being directed to contamination resulting from peaceful applications of nuclear energy. While such applications had great advantages, the possible dangers associated with them were difficult to foresee, and international co-operation in studies and research on the subject was therefore needed. His delegation welcomed the Scientific Committee's decision in 1970 to study not only radio-active fall-out from nuclear explosions but also the contamination resulting from the peaceful applications of nuclear energy. Three Japanese scientists had participated in the work of the Scientific Committee's twenty-first session, held at United Nations Headquarters from 14 to 23 June 1971. The extremely valuable discussions held at that session would undoubtedly contribute much to the high scientific standards of the Scientific Committee's report to the General Assembly in 1972, which was being awaited with keen interest.

10. Lastly, he considered that the document entitled "Assessment and Control of Environmental Contamination: Experience with Artificial Radio-Activity" of 28 June 1971, which had been submitted by the Scientific Committee to the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment would represent a substantial contribution to the preparation of documentation for that Conference. His delegation had high regard for the work of the Scientific Committee and hoped that the Special Political Committee would approve the draft resolution unanimously.

11. Mr. BRADY (Australia) paid tribute to the Scientific Committee, of which Australia had been a member since its inception. His delegation, a sponsor of draft resolution A/SPC/L.203, would continue to support the work of that Committee and hoped that an increasing number of countries would participate in it by contributing reports on radio-activity in the environment.

12. Australia noted with concern that further atmospheric nuclear tests had been held in the Pacific since the twenty-fifth session of the General Assembly. As a country of the Asian and Pacific region, Australia had expressed its opposition to the continuation of such atmospheric tests in that region. It wished to see the Partial Test Ban Treaty¹ universally applied and would continue to support efforts in the United Nations to conclude an effective treaty banning nuclear weapons tests in all environments.

13. His delegation supported the proposal that the report of the Scientific Committee should be submitted separately from its annexes, since that would provide delegations with a less complex document. However, the annexes should be published at the same time as the report and should contain a reprint of the basic paper.

14. He commended the Scientific Committee on the excellence of the basic paper it had prepared for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, providing

useful guidelines for the preparatory work of the Conference.

15. Mr. ARIF (India) observed that rapid strides had been made in the peaceful application of atomic energy in many fields and recalled that India had done considerable pioneering work in such applications and had pointed out the hazards of increased levels of atomic radiation. India was a member of the Scientific Committee, which for the past 16 years had focused world attention on the hazards of atomic radiation and the need for study and research on the subject. He praised the Scientific Committee's excellent work, particularly on the dissemination of information gathered in its fields of competence. His delegation noted with interest that the subjects referred to in paragraph 3 of the Scientific Committee's report (A/8334) would be dealt with in the report to be submitted in 1972 by the Scientific Committee to the General Assembly at its twenty-seventh session. It also welcomed the co-operation Member States were giving the Scientific Committee. India viewed with concern the atmospheric contamination resulting from nuclear tests conducted in a neighbouring country and awaited with interest the Scientific Committee's report on the levels of radiation in different parts of the world.

16. In conclusion, he noted that his delegation was a sponsor of the draft resolution before the Special Political Committee.

17. Mr. GROOS (Canada) said that his delegation was looking forward to the publication of the Scientific Committee's major report in 1972. He supported the idea of publishing separately the report to the General Assembly and the scientific annexes. In that way delegations would be spared detailed scientific material which meant little to most of their members, the Secretariat would be relieved of the enormous task of producing the annexes as Assembly documents, and, at the same time, the world scientific community would be provided with a comprehensive reference work on the effects of atomic radiation.

18. He recalled the circumstances in which the Scientific Committee had been established in 1955 (General Assembly resolution 913 (X)) and noted that, by assembling a comprehensive picture of world radiation levels and evaluating the effects of that radiation, the Committee had contributed to the conclusion of treaties banning nuclear tests¹ and controlling the proliferation of nuclear weapons.² Although the Scientific Committee's activities were now more in the environmental than in the political field, the Committee having helped in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment to be held in Stockholm in 1972, his delegation hoped that the abhorrence of nuclear testing which the work of the Committee had helped to arouse would induce those Governments which were now persisting in their test programmes to adhere to a complete ban on all tests wherever they might take place.

19. Lastly, while it felt that the report being prepared by the Scientific Committee would be a worth-while document, his delegation believed that once the report was

¹ Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water, signed on 5 August 1963 in Moscow.

² Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, signed on 1 July 1968.

issued some thought should be given to the future of the Committee. The work of the Scientific Committee was in some ways complemented by that of the International Atomic Energy Agency, and it was hoped that the Conference on the Human Environment would make recommendations for co-ordinating United Nations efforts to monitor contamination of the environment. The totality of United Nations requirements in the matter of scientific advice should be examined without prejudgement. All countries should study the question, so that after the Conference it would be possible to organize the scientific resources of the United Nations in the most efficient possible manner.

20. Mr. ARNAUD (Argentina) noted that, as at the twenty-fifth session, his delegation was one of the sponsors of a draft resolution on the question of the effects of atomic radiation.

21. His delegation felt that the methods employed in the study of environmental radiation, which represented the Scientific Committee's contribution to the preparatory work for the Stockholm Conference, could also be applied to the study of other problems relating to contamination of the environment. The Scientific Committee had recently undertaken an analysis of the effects on man of radiation resulting from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, particularly in the production of electric power, and its conclusions in that regard should be taken into account by the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

22. Argentina would, as in the past, continue to contribute to the work of the Scientific Committee by providing information on environmental contamination due to nuclear explosions, on the movement of radio-active elements through the various food chains and the resulting radiation doses, on the exposure of certain workers to radiation, and on the use of radiation for medical purposes.

23. Mr. SPAČIL (Czechoslovakia) was pleased at the results of the twenty-first session of the Scientific Committee and was impressed by the high level of the Committee's work, particularly that dealing with the genetic effects of atomic radiation. Czechoslovakia would therefore continue to support the work in question, which was of value to all mankind.

24. He noted in that connexion that universality was one of the basic principles of the United Nations Charter and expressed the view that it was most improper that only Members of the United Nations and the specialized agencies should be able to contribute to the work of the Scientific Committee. Other States, such as the German Democratic Republic, could make a valuable contribution.

25. He reserved the right to comment on the United States representative's proposal.

26. Mr. NANDAN (Fiji) deplored the fact that, in spite of the known dangers of atomic radiation, certain countries were continuing to conduct nuclear tests in the atmosphere and elsewhere. The time would inevitably come when radiation would reach a level that would threaten the existence of man and his environment.

27. He took the opportunity to protest once again against all nuclear tests in the South Pacific area and to urge the French Government, in particular, to end its testing. He was particularly concerned at the dangers resulting from contamination of the atmosphere and the sea and noted that the latter was a principal source of food for the peoples of the Pacific. As the Government of Fiji had stated in May 1971, any increase in levels of radio-activity, no matter how small, must be regarded as unacceptable. There was no justification for subjecting the peoples of the South Pacific, against their will, to increased radiation, even if the increase was within the so-called "permissible levels" fixed by the International Commission on Radiological Protection. The resumption of nuclear testing was particularly regrettable at a time when world attention was focused on the problems of the human environment and the control of pollution. If the tests had to continue, why should not those who were conducting them find a testing ground closer to their metropolitan territory instead of posing a threat to the lives of 4 million people and to future generations in the Pacific?

28. His delegation, which was a co-sponsor of the draft resolution now before the Committee, urged all Member States to support it.

29. Mr. WOO (China) said that he was gratified to note that the Scientific Committee would continue to study the problem of radio-active contamination and the dangers resulting from the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. His delegation supported draft resolution A/SPC/L.203.

30. Mr. KAMIL (Indonesia) said that, as one of the countries which had adopted a programme for the peaceful use of nuclear energy, Indonesia was concerned about the possible effects of the resulting contamination. He recalled, in that connexion, paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 2623 (XXV), in which the Assembly drew attention to the Scientific Committee's invitation to States Members of the United Nations and members of the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency to submit available data; that appeal should be broadened to include all States. He observed that at a time when the entire world had become aware of the problems of pollution the Scientific Committee was playing a leading role in that regard, and his delegation would therefore support draft resolution A/SPC/L.203. He also wished to express his delegation's opposition to all nuclear testing which was designed to increase the military power of States.

31. Mr. NUSEIBEH (Jordan) said that he felt duty-bound to draw the Committee's attention to the very great potential consequences of the progress which Israel was making in the nuclear field—thanks largely to lavish technical and financial assistance from outside. Every country was entitled to develop a nuclear programme if it had the financial and technical wherewithal, and that was particularly so if the programme was geared to the peaceful use of atomic energy.

32. However, the Israeli programme was not a peaceful one. According to a report in *The New York Times* of 5 October 1971, United States intelligence believed that Israel already possessed the necessary components for an atomic bomb. It was therefore high time for the Committee

to concern itself with the radiation problems created by those preparations before the Middle East and Africa fell victim to them. The fact that Israel had refused to sign the Moscow Partial Test Ban Treaty and the non-proliferation Treaty proved that it was determined to go ahead with the production of atomic bombs.

33. He was in favour of authorizing the Scientific Committee to report to the General Assembly on the atomic radiation dangers now looming up in the Middle East, and he therefore proposed that operative paragraph 6 of the draft resolution should be replaced by the following text:

“6. *Calls upon* all Member States to provide full disclosure to the Scientific Committee concerning the effects of radiation on man, the environment and the genetic effects of radiation in any region of the world wherever atomic research and production, for whatever purpose, is carried out.”

34. Mr. DE SOTO (Peru) said that, while he realized that the report of the Scientific Committee hardly called for submitting anything but a procedural draft resolution, he felt that the question should remain on the agenda of every General Assembly session since it gave delegations an opportunity to express their concern about problems of urgent importance.

35. In that connexion, his Government was greatly concerned about the nuclear weapons tests being carried out by France in the Pacific, since it undeniably posed a serious threat to the environment, particularly the ocean waters which provided Peru with a great part of its natural resources, and to the health and safety of the peoples of the South Pacific. His Government had therefore called for putting an end once and for all to those tests, which were taking place in defiance of a number of General Assembly resolutions, and had sent a communication dated 15 September 1971 on the subject to the Secretary-General, who had himself acted as the spokesman of world public opinion in expressing the hope that all nuclear weapon tests would soon be brought to an end.

36. His delegation was not reassured by the explanations provided by the French Government regarding the safety measures taken in connexion with the Pacific tests, since it had not been demonstrated that they represented no danger whatever to the human environment, and it was concerned at the threat posed by the increased radio-activity. That was, he might add, probably the reason why an atoll situated so far from French metropolitan territory had been chosen for the tests.

37. Mr. OSMAN KHALIL (Egypt) said that he realized the considerations which made the United States delegation suggest that the General Assembly should consider the Scientific Committee's report only if important progress had been made in its work. However, in view of the vital importance of that Committee's work for all mankind, a regular annual examination of the report by the Assembly was desirable. As the Canadian representative had said, the serious, though unobtrusive, work accomplished by the Scientific Committee had helped to create an international climate which had favoured the more speedy conclusion of international agreements helping to reduce the nuclear threat.

38. Mr. ISSRAELIAN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the Scientific Committee had on several occasions examined the effects on man and his environment of atomic radiation from increasingly varied sources, and more particularly of radiation resulting from the peaceful uses of atomic energy. That problem should be examined particularly carefully as the effects might not be noticeable until several decades had passed and, in the case of genetic effects, several generations. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 2623 (XXV), the Committee had endeavoured to assess for the first time to what extent peaceful uses might contribute to the total radio-active contamination of the environment.

39. It should be noted that measurements of radiation examined by the Scientific Committee had shown that the concentration of radio-nuclides in the atmosphere had greatly diminished since the conclusion of the Moscow Treaty.

40. The work of the Scientific Committee, and more particularly the report it had prepared for the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment would be extremely useful to the Conference. He thought that the Committee should recommend that the Scientific Committee proceed with the preparation of its report for the twenty-seventh session of the General Assembly. As one of the sponsors of the draft resolution before the Committee, he would state his decision on the amendments proposed when they were circulated.

41. Mrs. MARTINEZ (Chile) said that the question under consideration was one to which her country was paying special attention. Her delegation wished to congratulate the Scientific Committee on its work on atomic radiation, which had added to the knowledge of the effect of radiation on man and his environment.

42. Her Government was strongly opposed to the carrying out of nuclear tests for military ends and regarded them as a threat to the future of mankind. It was essential that future generations should be protected and efforts must therefore be made to prevent the effects of atomic radiation. Chile was aware of the grave dangers of nuclear explosions in any area, and more particularly in the Pacific Ocean, as President Allende had recently affirmed in a joint declaration with Ecuador and Peru. It wanted an end to be put to such explosions and her delegation would support any resolution to that effect.

43. Mr. CHAMMAS (Lebanon) expressed the appreciation of his delegation of the work done in the field of atomic radiation by the United Nations as a whole and in particular by the Scientific Committee.

44. He thought the question of the representative of the United States of America entirely relevant. Was it really necessary to submit periodically a report which provided no new information? The representative of Canada had recalled that the creation of a committee to study and emphasize the grave consequences of nuclear tests had at the same time represented an attempt to restrict the activities of States in that field. That political aspect of the Scientific Committee's work was the concern of the Special Political Committee. But the scientific aspects of its work would seem to fall within the purview of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Agency had not existed when

the Scientific Committee had been set up, but it might well be asked whether the scientific reports of such a committee should always be submitted to the General Assembly, when it might be more logical for that committee to function as part of IAEA.

45. He had some comments to make on draft resolution A/SPC/L.203. In operative paragraph 8, it was recommended "that the Secretary-General should fully utilize the relevant experience of the Committee". Was it the Secretary-General of the United Nations or the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment who was being referred to? He would prefer the second interpretation, but the point should be cleared up. In operative paragraph 5, he thought that the expression "*Expresses its appreciation for*" should be used instead of "*Expresses its appreciation of*"; however, only a shade of meaning was involved.

46. Finally, in the Scientific Committee's report (A/8334), he thought paragraph 4 was doubly restrictive. To fulfil its mandate properly, the Committee should not limit itself to examining the data received from "States Members of the United Nations or members of specialized agencies or of the International Atomic Energy Agency". Nor should it confine itself to the study of radio-active contamination of the environment due to the "peaceful uses" of atomic energy. That point had already been made by the representative of Jordan.

47. Mr. MERIGO AZA (Mexico) congratulated the Scientific Committee on its report on the effects of atomic radiation, the brevity of which deserved commendation and might well serve as an example for other United Nations bodies.

48. His delegation wished to add its voice to the many expressions of hope that the nuclear Powers would agree to put an end once and for all to nuclear explosions. Mexico had always urged that atomic energy should be utilized only for peaceful ends and his delegation called on the members of the Committee to adopt draft resolution A/SPC/L.203, with the amendment proposed by the Brazilian representative.

49. Mr. DE LA GORCE (France) had listened with interest to the remarks made on the subject of the French nuclear explosions and had in particular noted the recognition of one essential fact: the New Zealand representative had in effect admitted that the level of radiation observed in the area concerned had been well below the level endangering human health. Other speakers had mentioned the harmful effects such tests might have on the biological life of the fauna and flora of the Pacific Ocean. His delegation wished to specify that the recent explosions had taken place at an altitude that had been carefully calculated to prevent any contact between the radio-active particles and the surface of the ocean. Furthermore the results were constantly being monitored by three French oceanographic vessels. Such permanent monitoring was proof of the French Government's concern lest any harmful effects should result. That concern had been expressed before the General Assembly (1942nd plenary meeting) by Mr. Maurice Schumann, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of France, who had declared that such tests would no longer be justified if they were liable to endanger life—first of all, of course, human life, but also the life of the flora and

fauna on land and in the sea. The French Foreign Minister had described the system installed five years previously to monitor the development of radio-activity at various points around the world and had pointed out that France had invited scientists and researchers from the countries concerned to participate in the work of observation and monitoring. That was, the Foreign Minister had noted, a unique and unprecedented effort at international scientific co-operation whose results were communicated regularly to the Scientific Committee and were made available to all Members of the United Nations.

50. France would, of course, pursue and further broaden such efforts and co-operation. On that point, referring to the remarks just made by the representative of New Zealand, who had welcomed the fact that France had recently submitted reports to the Scientific Committee, he wished to make it clear that France had regularly communicated all the results of its observations to the Scientific Committee ever since the start of its tests.

51. Mr. PESMAZOGLU (Greece) said that as humanity progressed along the path of civilization, the problem of radiation became ever more urgent. Greece, which had been one of the first to sign the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapon Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water, had always devoted special attention to that problem. His delegation thought that the Scientific Committee's report should be submitted to the General Assembly, with or without its annexes. It would vote in favour of draft resolution A/SPC/L.203.

52. Mr. CAHANA (Israel) wanted to know if the representative of Brazil had submitted a formal amendment.

53. The CHAIRMAN was gratified that the discussion had proved useful. Four matters still had to be examined: the two formal amendments to draft resolution A/SPC/L.203 submitted by Brazil—concerning operative paragraph 8—and by Jordan—concerning operative paragraph 6—the proposal of the United States of America concerning the periodical nature of the reports, and the various points raised by the representative of Lebanon. The members of the Committee should acquaint themselves with the texts of the amendments and the authors of the draft resolution should make their comments on it before the debate was pursued.

54. Mr. CHAMMAS (Lebanon) pointed out that he had never intended to cast doubt on the constitutional competence of the General Assembly; he had merely questioned the usefulness of submitting a report, the technical nature of which might exceed the Assembly's competence in scientific matters. His remarks on the draft resolution, which concerned only minor points, were not formal proposals, and his delegation would support the draft resolution before the Committee, together with the amendments submitted by Brazil and Jordan. He wished, however, to draw the attention of the Committee to the fact that the wording of the resolution implied that submission of the Scientific Committee's report to the General Assembly in 1972 had already been decided on.

55. Mrs. O'DONNELL (United States of America) withdrew her delegation's proposal, since it did not seem to be acceptable to the Committee.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.