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FOURTH COMMITTEE CONSIDERS EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION ON HUMANKIND, ENVIRONMENT;

APPROVES DRAFT TEXT IN SUPPORT OF STRENGTHENED FUNDING FOR SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Secretary-General's Input Sought on Financial, Administrative Implications of Scientific Committee's Increased Membership; Body to Meet Seven Days in 2008

In its consideration of the effects of radiation on humankind and the environment, the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) today unanimously approved a draft resolution in support of the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, which, since 1955, had contributed to an improved understanding of the effects and risks of ionizing radiation -- a type of radiation given off by radioactive substances.

The Secretary of the Scientific Committee, Malcolm Crick, addressing the Fourth Committee today, said he believed the Committee was held in high esteem by Governments and scientific bodies, but feared that financial and staffing constraints could compromise the high standards for which it was known.

He said that the recommendations of the Scientific Committee, comprised of scientists representing 21 Member States, were regularly noted by policy-making bodies, such as International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) when formulating safety standards and protection programmes. The ILO had developed its occupational radiation protection instrument using data from the Scientific Committee, while the FAO had developed guidelines on food contamination. That data had also been used to help develop regulations on the transport of radioactive material.

Funding for the secretariat of the Scientific Committee, however, had fallen dramatically over the past few years, even though the amount of work it had done had steadily increased, Mr. Crick said. The secretariat was also beset by staffing problems: after the post for one of two professionals within the secretariat was abolished in 1992, it had become ever more difficult for it to keep pace with new scientific developments.

Thus, the draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation would have the General Assembly urge the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) -- the administering Programme -- to strengthen the Scientific Committee's funding mechanisms and to continue to seek out temporary funding measures to complement existing ones. In addition, the resolution would have the Assembly appeal to the Secretary-General to take the measures needed for the secretariat of the Scientific Committee to serve Member States in a "predictable and sustainable manner".

Also by the draft, the Assembly would endorse, on an exceptional basis, the Committee's intention to convene its fifty-sixth session for seven days instead of the usual five. It was thought that lengthening the Committee's meeting time would enable it to address the long list of issues before it, including those arising from recent interest in the nuclear power option, said Mr. Crick.

During their debate on the issue, members of the Fourth Committee raised the issue of potential mounting costs associated with an increase in membership. In 2007, six countries had expressed their desire to join the Scientific Committee: Belarus, Finland, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Spain and Ukraine. Where some, like Cuba's delegate, said that requests for membership should be considered as soon as possible, others, like Japan's representative, said that financial issues should be addressed before discussing that possibility.

The representative of Pakistan, one of the six countries wishing to join the Scientific Committee, expressed the hope that financial and administrative issues would be fully addressed next year -- as stipulated by the draft resolution approved today -- thus enabling Pakistan and the others to assume full membership in the Scientific Committee. Indeed, the draft text would have the Assembly invite each of those six Member States to designate one scientist to attend, as observers, the next session of the Committee while requesting the Secretary-General to submit a report addressing the financial and administrative implications of increased Committee membership.

Speaking before the vote, the representative of Belarus, whose country had been badly affected by the Chernobyl accident of 1986 that had occurred in neighbouring Ukraine, said its Government had extremely valuable knowledge about atomic radiation, but felt that its desire to become part of the Scientific Committee had been "ignored" for some years. He had joined consensus on the text on the understanding that the Fourth Committee would unanimously approve the membership of the six Member States, and the Scientific Committee's secretariat would pursue that aim by addressing, with the Secretary-General, the financial and administrative implications of increased Committee membership.

Also speaking were the representatives of Japan, Uruguay (speaking on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), Portugal (speaking on behalf of the European Union and associated States), India, Myanmar, Iraq and Syria.

The representative of Australia, whose country chaired the Scientific Committee's fifty-fifth session, introduced the draft resolution.

Earlier in the morning, the Committee concluded its debate on international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space by hearing the representatives of Israel and the Ukraine.

The Committee will meet again at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, 31 October to begin its comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all its aspects, where it will hear statements on the work of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support.

Background

The Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) met today to conclude its debate on international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space and to begin its consideration of the effects of atomic radiation.

The report before the Committee on outer space issues is summarized in Press Release GA/SPD/379.

With regard to the item on the effects of atomic radiation, the Committee had before it a report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (document A/62/46), which covers that body's fifty-fifth session, held in Vienna from 21 to 25 May 2007.

According to the report, the Scientific Committee reviews global exposure to sources of radiation -- such as nuclear weapon production and testing, nuclear electricity generation, and others -- and its effects on human health and the environment. In 2006, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had been tasked by the General Assembly to strengthen the Committee's funding, and had duly established a general trust fund to receive and manage voluntary contributions from Member States and other bodies to complement existing appropriations from the regular budget of the United

Nations. However, the Scientific Committee noted at its fifty-fifth session that it was "critical" to restore an operating budget that would allow it to fulfil its mandate in a predictable manner.

For several years, the Scientific Committee had been expressing deep concern over its secretariat's reliance on a single post at the professional level, the report says. At its fifty-fifth session, the Committee appealed to the Assembly to urge the Secretary-General to redeploy an additional post at the professional level to the secretariat of the Scientific Committee. Furthermore, it noted that around 100 experts, including observers from international organizations, attended its annual sessions. Since a large membership would add to its servicing costs, in addition to seriously hampering its ability to build consensus on complex issues, the Committee stressed that a financial solution should be found before any talks could begin on expanding its membership.

In addition, the report says the Scientific Committee had emphasized that representatives assigned to it by States members must be active scientists who were knowledgeable on a broad range of issues in the field of radiation levels and effects, were able to compile, prepare and evaluate scientific reports, could competently assess draft scientific documents, and were capable of summarizing and synthesizing material for the General Assembly, the scientific community and the public.

Also according to the report, the Scientific Committee had decided to develop a long-term strategic plan that would act as a planning tool for future programme budgets. The plan would be developed at its next session, scheduled to take place in Vienna from 10 to 18 July 2008.

The Committee also had before it a draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation (document A/C.4/62/L.5).

Statements on Outer Space

LIVIA LINK (Israel) said space observations were responsible for a large number of scientific discoveries, a fact that underscored space's huge scientific importance. The space industry was filled with vision, upheld the best human resources and offered an important infrastructure for industrial development. Much progress had been made in the 50 years since Sputnik first orbited the Earth, yet progress was hard to achieve alone. Joining forces was the best way to assure substantive advance and technological breakthrough. Israel had been an observer in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and was committed to the vision and broad objectives of United Nations efforts to ensure the peaceful uses of outer space. It was continuing to emphasize the use of technological advantages in certain niches and had continued to cooperate with other nations and international agencies towards that goal.

In that regard, she noted that her country was cooperating with France in a project on Vegetation and Environment Monitoring New Micro-satellite (VENUS), which included the development, manufacture and operation of an observation micro-satellite. The VENUS project was expected to monitor, analyze and model land surface functioning under influences of environmental factors and human activities. It would apply to "precision farming", which optimized agriculture and aquaculture through space technologies. Israel was also cooperating with India with TAUVEX, the Tel-Aviv University Ultraviolet Imaging Experiment, which would measure objects in space using the ultraviolet spectrum. Her country had also signed cooperation agreements with sister agencies from a number of countries, and hoped to sign agreements with more.

Israel's private sector was also contributing to the space industry and had developed several projects with applications around the world, she said. Its private companies and academic and research institutions had been actively engaged in exploring technologies that would alleviate some of humanity's most pressing environmental needs. It was willing to expand its space cooperation and share its knowledge and expertise with other States, and allow those without space access to enjoy its benefits. Space should be used as a platform to bring States closer together, enhancing cooperation for the benefit of all.

SERGIY KYSLYTSYA (Ukraine) said his country had recently approved and submitted for parliament's adoption a draft law on the new national target-oriented space programme for 2008-2012, which would quadruple funding for the country's space programme. The programme reflected a new

approach to national space activity by addressing problems of sustainable development through earth observation and space data. It would create a spacecraft group, intensify cooperation in the international space market and launch a national satellite telecommunication system. The programme also foresaw the development of advanced space technology and the modernization of ground-based infrastructure. It would strengthen national security and expand education, research and country-wide applications of space technology.

He said that implementation of the programme would transform Ukraine's space sector into a priority branch of the economy, and ensure the development of space uses to benefit the economy and the population. Ukraine participated in peaceful uses of outer space: in November 2006, it had co-organized the United Nations International Workshop on Space Law for the United Nations Economic Commission Member States. It had also supported the development of the United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (SPIDER) and had participated in various partnerships, including commercial projects, such as the "Alcantara" space port with Brazil. In 2007, Ukrainian launch vehicles made four orbital launches for different countries.

The first all-Ukrainian conference on space and sustainable development would take place 3 to 5 June 2008, on the question of the status of air space information used to address natural resources management, sustainable development and security, he said. In conducting space policy, Ukraine realized the danger of rocket technology proliferation, especially against the backdrop of terrorism. Recognizing the problem of man-made debris, Ukraine sought to eliminate space debris and had modified its space launch vehicles and spacecraft in accordance with the recommendations of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee.

Having concluded its consideration of international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, the Committee then turned to the agenda item on the effects of atomic radiation.

Statement by the Secretary of the Scientific Committee

MALCOLM CRICK, Secretary of the Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), recalled that the Committee's mandate was to assess the effects and risks on human beings and the environment of ionizing radiation, and to provide policy-relevant information to policy-making bodies. There were currently 21 States members of the Scientific Committee, and six more had expressed a desire to join.

He said that the Scientific Committee reported annually to the Fourth Committee, which, in turn, directed any requests it might have of the Scientific Committee to its administering body, UNEP, including requests for financial resources. The secretariat of the Scientific Committee was comprised of one professional staff and two general staff, who were tasked with presenting reports to the Committee, which met annually. The secretariat also publishes major scientific reviews every four to five years**,** with the last one published in 2000-2001.

Among the Committee's tasks was to examine the evidence of radiation health effects resulting from the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the effects of the Chernobyl accident, he said. The Committee was also a repository of data gathered from scientific literature, research conducted by Member States, and non-governmental organizations. Its recommendations were picked up by specialized agencies, such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), among others, to formulate safety standards and protection programmes.

For example, he noted that ILO had developed its occupational radiation protection instrument using data from the Scientific Committee, while FAO had developed guidelines on food contamination. That data was also used to help develop regulations on the transportation of radioactive material.

As for the Scientific Committee's budget, he said it had fallen dramatically over the past few years, even though the amount of work it had done had steadily increased. The amount of cost-free aid from national laboratories had also fallen. Meanwhile, in 1992, the position for one professional within the secretariat had been abolished, leaving one professional staff member. It was difficult to keep pace with new scientific developments under those circumstances.

He noted that the Committee's budget constraints had resulted in delays in reporting. Given that much of the data was time-sensitive, such delays raised concerns. With only one professional in the secretariat, there was an increased risk of errors. At its last meeting, members of the committee had raised concerns about the risk to the credibility of its reports, which, thus far, had always been highly respected. The secretariat must often deal with issues across disciplines, such as physics and biology, which was impossible for one person to do.

He said that an increase in membership to the Scientific Committee would add to the costs it incurred each year. At its next session, the Committee intended to address 41 issues, including those arising from recent interest in the nuclear power option. Consideration of those issues could not be achieved in the usual five-day session. He stressed that the Committee was extremely respected by Governments and scientific bodies; its findings critically underpinned Government programmes, and those of international organizations, on protection. At the moment, however, staffing problems hindered output.

Questions and Answers

Opening an interactive discussion, the Fourth Committee Chairman, ABDALMAHMOOD ABDALHALEEM MOHAMAD (Sudan) asked how the Atomic Radiation Committee planned to encourage more participation from developing countries.

Iraq's representative asked why the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation secretariat had only one expert, and whether that was the result of the small number of Member States who were on the Committee.

The representative of Finland also asked about the number of Committee members, noting that a mechanism of observing had been developed to allow participation, without incurring financial hardships. She asked if the Committee would be able to sustain this "observership" option.

The representative of Belarus asked if it was possible to get the report on Chernobyl earlier.

Nigeria's representative asked why the report on Chernobyl had still not been made available so many years after the incident.

In responding to the question from Iraq, Mr. CRICK said he did not know the answer, but thought it was a "legacy" issue. A second post had existed, but had been abolished in the 1990s.

Replying to the Chairman's question, Mr. Crick stressed that the Committee had been scientific and not political during its early years, and had received valuable contributions from the developing world. The Scientific Committee had been the vehicle for sharing information globally in the middle of the century, but the Internet was the method of doing so now. The Scientific Committee would be working on the way it shared and coordinated information.

To the question on the Chernobyl report's availability, Mr. Crick noted that Belarus had been sending an observer to the Committee for a number of years, and the Committee would be working through that observer to send a copy of the report to Belarus to ensure that important details were not missed.

In response to Nigeria's question, Mr. Crick noted that the Committee had issued two previous reports, and that this report was an update on the health implications of the disaster. The report had not been time-critical, but might have clarified some issues at the event's twentieth anniversary had it been available.

In response to Finland's question, he said there were no problems foreseen in managing six observers at the next meeting. The problem lay in managing more people in a decision-making capacity.

Introduction of Draft Resolution

CLARE ANNABEL GATEHOUSE (Australia), whose country had chaired the Scientific Committee's fifty-fifth session, introduced the draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation (document A/C.4/62/L.5), saying that Governments and organizations around the world relied on the Scientific Committee's estimates as a basis for evaluating radiation risk. For example, the estimates were used by the International Atomic Energy Agency, as acknowledged by the Agency's General Conference in its resolution GC (51)/RES/11.

She said that Australia welcomed the development of a long-term strategic plan for the Scientific Committee's future programme of work in 2008. The relevance of the Committee's work today, and the need to disseminate its findings quickly, was important in the context of the current energy debate. Its work was vital on the effects on people and the ecosystem of ionizing radiation, and was an issue of great concern when assessing future energy options.

Australia was pleased that UNEP had established a trust fund for the Scientific Committee, but noted that it should not be seen as an alternative to providing adequate resources for the secretariat. Recently, Member States had been frustrated by the fact that their significant contributions at sessions of the Scientific Committee had not resulted in the timely publication of the Committee's findings. Australia appreciated the benefits of the Committee in holding, on an exceptional basis, a seven-day session in 2008, recognizing the need to finalize assessments that would otherwise become out of date. In addition, financial, operational and scientific issues must be resolved before new members could contribute to its work.

She said it was her hope that the draft resolution before the Fourth Committee would be adopted by consensus.

NORIYUKI NAKANO (Japan) said that the Scientific Committee had provided a vital function in reviewing the sources and effects of ionizing radiation. As a country long committed to the safest possible use of nuclear technology, Japan had benefited from the Scientific Committee's work. The Government of Japan was planning to hold a symposium on the "Recent Achievement of UNSCEAR and Future Directions of Radiation Research" next month. It was important for the Scientific Committee to continue to carry out its study of radiation's effects to ensure the safety and security of human beings and the environment, and to promote uses of radiation for medical purposes. For that reason, the United Nations Environmental Programme should review and strengthen the present arrangements for the Scientific Committee and consider a temporary funding mechanism on a voluntary basis to complement existing ones.

Noting that six Member States had expressed their desire to become members of the Scientific Committee, he said those six countries would be ready to dispatch profound expertise on atomic radiation, particularly scientists from nations that had accumulated scientific observations through the Chernobyl accident. Yet, Japan held that considering and clarifying the standard qualifications to serve as a Scientific Committee member was necessary to ensure that body's proper functioning. Thus, it shared the concerns expressed in the Committee's report on the impact of such an increase. Financial and administrative issues should be addressed before discussing that possibility.

FEDERICO PERAZZA (Uruguay), on behalf of Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), said that Governments of the region had provided experts to participate in the Scientific Committee's work since its inception, and planned to continue such support. Those same Governments would encourage the early release of their 2006 report, and noted with satisfaction that estimates of the risks of exposure to ionizing radiation had not changed. They also encouraged the early completion of overdue reports that had already been reviewed at the fifty-third and fifty-fourth sessions of the Scientific Committee, expressing concern over reasons for the delay -- lack of resources.

He reaffirmed the need for UNEP to strengthen its support for the Scientific Committee, as instructed by a resolution of the General Assembly from last year. The region was pleased with the one-time financial contribution made by the Environment Programme to help publish the Scientific Committee's 2006 report, and also by the creation of a trust fund to manage potential extra-budgetary contributions. However, the problem of guaranteeing stable, permanent and regular support still remained.

As the Scientific Committee considered the development of a long-term strategic plan, it should not ignore other urgent tasks, such as Argentina's request for answers regarding the "problem of attributing detrimental effects at low doses of radiation". Failure to resolve that question could lead to legal problems.

REBECA HERNANDEZ TOLEDANO (Cuba) said the difficult budgetary, financial and staff situation of the Scientific Committee had detracted from its efficiency and contributed to the inability to fully implement its adopted work plan, particularly its issuance of documents. She called for the search to continue for alternative financing sources, and considered appropriate the Committee's planned strategy to prepare its future work plan.

She said it was unjustifiable that there were still about 30,000 nuclear weapons in the world, and she reiterated her country's firm commitment to the prohibition and total elimination of all nuclear weapons, and its total opposition to the use of nuclear energy for warlike purposes. Cuba had provided significant assistance to Ukraine to reduce the consequences of the Chernobyl accident, particularly by assisting accident victims -– mostly children -– in a rehabilitation programme. It would continue to provide that assistance and, to date, had helped 18,546 children and 3,400 adults. Besides its humanitarian impact, that programme also had a scientific impact. Primary data had been obtained on internal contamination of infants from areas affected by the accident. Its information had also been disseminated at the main scientific forums.

The Scientific Committee's consideration of expanding its membership was appreciated, and the participation of non-member scientists was also welcome, she said. The request from six Member States to become Committee members should be considered as soon as possible. Keeping and strengthening the bonds of cooperation among the Committee, the Member States and the different bodies and agencies of the United Nations system was also important.

MIGUEL GRACA (Portugal), on behalf of the European Union, voiced support for the Scientific Committee's work on the long-term health and environmental effects of ionizing radiation, as in the case of the Chernobyl accident. The European Union looked forward to receiving that Committee's assessments following its participation in the Chernobyl Forum last year.

He said the European Union welcomed the participation of observers at the 2007 meeting of the Scientific Committee from the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Health Organization, IAEA, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the European Commission, the International Commission on Radiological Protection, the International Commission on Radiation Units and Measurements, the International Organization for Standardization and the International Union of Radioecology.

Just as interest in the Committee's scientific work had increased significantly, its funding had been reduced, he noted. The draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation before the Fourth Committee addressed the issues of staffing and funding, as well as of the increased membership to the Scientific Committee. That resolution also invited six Member States desiring to become members to designate one scientist each to attend, as observers, its fifty-sixth session. The European Union looked forward to receiving the Secretary-General's report on those matters.

ANDREI METELITSA (Belarus) commended the Committee's work, adding that the study on Chernobyl's effects on human health was particularly welcome. The Committee's work was very important to sharing the effects and risk of atomic radiation, and it was highly regarded in the scientific community. Its work was also widely used in Belarus, including in evaluating national standards for public health protection.

He said that the size of the territory and the population affected by the Chernobyl catastrophe had made it the most major atomic tragedy of the century. Despite being the smallest country affected, Belarus had suffered from approximately 70 per cent of the fallout. He noted the lack of attention to that situation, despite the fact that many people continued to suffer from Chernobyl's effects. He emphasized Belarus's high rates of morbidity and the elevated cancer rates, with the latter rates 16 times higher than

in those countries not affected by Chernobyl. Those facts underscored how much was still not known about the effects of atomic radiation.

For the future of the people who had been so tragically affected, he said his country was particularly interested in becoming a member of the Scientific Committee. Belarus and its scientists had accumulated a considerable amount of research on radiological effects, particularly on human health and the environment, and it was ready to make a contribution to the Scientific Committee.

SHRIPAD YASSO NAIK (India), expressing appreciation for the Scientific Committee's work, noted that it was in the process of completing its review of certain issues, such as: radiation exposure on the public and workers; accidental radiation exposure; exposure arising from medical uses of radiation; the effects of radiation on non-human biota; and health effects due to the Chernobyl accident, among others. The use of radiation for medical purposes, such as X-ray exams, computerized tomography and nuclear medicine, was on the rise, but proper documentation and monitoring of patient or attendees' exposure was not being done.

He said that the biological and health effects of natural radiation exposure required continuous monitoring, and international agencies should step in to ensure critical assessment of those effects. Indeed, "natural laboratories", such as the one in Kerala's south western coast, should be the focus of detailed scientific enquiry. As yet, there was no evidence of any significant deleterious effects of such natural exposure.

Dogmatic adherence to the "Linear No Threshold" hypothesis as a cornerstone of radiation protection schemes had put an unnecessary economic burden on the increasing number of countries that were seeking to develop nuclear electricity generation as a cleaner and cheaper option, he said. It was time to revisit those regimes. Central to the re-evaluation of that hypothesis was the "attributability" of radiation effects.

He said that biological and health effects were very complex, with more than one type of agent and signalling processes triggering the same effect, such as cancer. Non-radiation causes, such as smoking, diet and so on, might add to a marginal radiation effect. Therefore, the analysis of confounding factors was critical, and how much an effect could be attributed to radiation exposure should be a matter of serious discussion. He added that cancer-centred consideration of deleterious health effects of radiation exposure should not overshadow the other possible effects, such as in-utero effects and others, in deciding the exposure limits. He called for adequate budgetary support for the Scientific Committee.

U HTIN LYNN (Myanmar) said the world was faced with an ominous threat due to the growing possibility of nuclear accidents and the subsequent release of radiation. Atomic radiation could inflict immense suffering, yet those tragedies were preventable. Identifying and reviewing the sources of radiation and evaluating their effect on human health were fundamental steps for preventing such situations and protecting against them. The work done by the Scientific Committee to provide the scientific foundation for formulating international basic safety standards for radiation was commendable, and it was imperative that the Committee continued to fulfil its mandate. Thus, it should be equipped with necessary resources, and Member States who were in a position to do so should also field active scientists to further enhance the Committee's work.

He said that the Chernobyl disaster's effects on humans and the environment were ongoing. More should be done to alleviate the resulting environmental degradation and the effects on health and the economy. Information on how to maintain healthy lifestyles, despite the effects of low radiation, would be helpful and should be disseminated. The tragedy had provided many lessons and highlighted the need to focus on nuclear safety and redouble efforts to prevent atomic contamination. Myanmar had enacted the Atomic Energy Law in 1998 for the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. That law provided for the utilization, production, storage, distribution, sale, import and export of nuclear and radioactive material and apparatus. Regulations had also been drafted to ensure radiation safety.

ASIM IFTIKHAR AMHAD (Pakistan) said it would be unfortunate if minor administrative or financial constraints were allowed to hamper the work of the Scientific Committee. In response to the General Assembly's invitation, Pakistan and five other countries had expressed interest in becoming

members. Pakistan possessed the relevant experience and professional expertise, and would contribute much to the Committee's work.

He expressed satisfaction that the draft resolution under consideration would constitute a further step towards the increase in the Scientific Committee's membership. While Pakistan would have preferred a decision in 2007 to increase the membership, he hoped that the financial and administrative issues would be fully addressed in the intervening one-year period, thus enabling Pakistan and others to assume full membership of the Scientific Committee, thereafter.

ABDULSATTAR AL-JANABI (Iraq) said that the effects of ionizing radiation on populations were many, and held significant dangers for people and the environment. The Scientific Committee had been submitting a number of important and accurate scientific reports on the effects of atomic radiation. Aware of the importance of that topic, Iraq had established a body to review the source of ionizing radiation. That committee had started its work in 2005 and would participate in sharing its information. Iraq called upon States to cooperate fully with the United Nations to protect the planet from the risks of radiation.

MANAR TALEB (Syria) commended the Scientific Committee on its work, and said that it should continue to undertake the functions entrusted to it. Syria's own policy towards the use of nuclear technology was rooted in the belief that the peaceful uses of such technology by all countries should be allowed. He was concerned by the attitudes of some that made it difficult for developing countries to obtain nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.

He said that Syria had been one of the first to call for a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East, which, in addition to making the region safer, would also reduce the hazards of atomic radiation. In striving to bring about a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East, Syria had adhered to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons since 1969 and had complied with the nuclear safeguards of the IAEA. It had also submitted, on behalf of the Arab Group, a 2003 draft resolution to the Security Council on the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East, under the oversight of the international community and the United Nations.

Israel possessed nuclear weapons, but did not submit its facilities to international monitoring, he noted. It had not adhered to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty or to the IAEA safeguards, thus undermining peace and security in the region and contributing to possible environmental dangers. The international community should work together to pressure Israel to subject its eight nuclear facilities to IAEA oversight, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolution of 1981.

He also drew attention to the danger resulting from the disposal of nuclear waste in developing country territory, including through the sinking of nuclear material in the high seas or oceans. He recalled that Israel had buried nuclear waste in the Occupied Syrian Golan, and drew the attention of Member States to the seriousness of that issue, which required international cooperation to resolve.

Action on Draft Resolution

The Committee Chairman noted that the draft resolution on the effects of atomic radiation (document A/C.4/62/L.5) had only been issued this morning, and asked whether the Committee would agree to waive the 24-hour rule, in order to take action on that text.

The representative of Iran said he saw no problem with taking action on the text today, and asked the representative of Australia, as its main co-sponsor, to elaborate on any major amendments to the text from that of the previous year's version.

Australia's representative said that among the new provisions were those related to the Scientific Committee's financial concerns and questions of membership. Apart from those terms, all other changes had been technical updates.

The Secretary of the Committee then took the floor to explain that, should the draft be adopted by the General Assembly, it was estimated that additional requirements in the amount of $63,100 would

arise for servicing the Scientific Committee's fifty-sixth session for seven days, instead of the 5-day period normally allotted to it. Provisions had been made in the programme budget for 2006-2007 for implementing the terms of the draft.

The Secretary made some editorial amendments to the text, as did the representative of Pakistan.

Speaking before the vote, the representative of Belarus noted that his country had just joined the group sponsoring the resolution. Still, it had serious comments to make on the resolution's final two paragraphs. While two countries seriously affected by the effects of atomic radiation –- the Russian Federation and Japan –- were members of the Scientific Committee, two others -- Belarus and Ukraine –- were not. Belarus, by a tragic quirk of fate, had the opportunity to acquire information on the effects of radiation on man and the environment as a result of the Chernobyl accident. Thus, it had extremely valuable knowledge about atomic radiation, which it believed could benefit the world community.

He said his country was puzzled by the lack of response to its desire to become part of the Scientific Committee; its intention to do so had been ignored. That had been going on for some years. Last year it had managed to have incorporated into General Assembly resolution 61/109 the question of including Belarus in the Committee, and the resolution had noted Belarus' application.

Currently, as part of compromise and to ensure consensus, he said his country had agreed to defer becoming a member of the Scientific Committee until next year. It considered that, according to paragraph 15 of the present text, the Fourth Committee would unanimously approve that the six Member States wished to become members and regarded paragraph 16 as an indication that the Scientific Committee's secretariat would pursue that aim by addressing the financial and administrative implications of increased Committee membership.

He requested that that clarification be recorded in the proceedings of today's meeting.

Then, acting without a vote, the Fourth Committee approved the draft resolution, as orally amended.

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