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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 11th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Friday, 16 October 2009, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Al-Nasser . . . . . (Qatar)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 29: Effects of atomic radiation
(A/64/223)

1. **Mr. Gentner** (Chairman, United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation), accompanying his statement with a computerized slide presentation, recalled that some of the Scientific Committee's major accomplishments had been the production of data that had led to the cessation of atmospheric tests of nuclear weapons, the evaluation of radiation risks, and the compilation of sources of exposure and their magnitude, which had been a major factor in reducing exposure worldwide. Unfortunately, as explained in his letter addressed to the President of the General Assembly (A/64/223), owing to unforeseen circumstances, the Committee's fifty-seventh session had had to be rescheduled to April 2010; nevertheless, steps had been taken to mitigate the consequences of the delay and follow up on the matters raised in General Assembly resolution 63/89.

2. With regard to the assessment and review of the effects of ionizing radiation (paras. 5 and 6), the Scientific Committee had issued volumes I and II of its 2006 report in July 2008 and July 2009 respectively, but its 2008 report, which had been approved at the fifty-sixth session, was not yet available. The Committee regretted the delays as its outputs were relied upon as primary sources and scientific data quickly became outdated. Work had begun on six priority topics for the new document cycle, namely assessments of levels of radiation from energy production and the effects on human health and the environment; uncertainty in radiation risk estimation; attribution of health effects due to radiation exposure; updating of the methodology for estimating exposures due to discharges from nuclear installations; summary of radiation effects; and improvement of data collection, analysis and dissemination. Other topics being developed were the biological effects of key internal emitters; medical exposures of patients; enhanced exposures to natural sources of radiation due to human activities; public information; and development of a knowledge base on radiation levels and effects.

3. On the question of data collection and cooperation with other bodies (paras. 8, 9 and 11), he noted that the Scientific Committee cooperated with the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the European Union and non-governmental organizations in both the collection and dissemination of data. Those bodies attended the Committee's sessions as observers and contributed to discussions. The secretariat was scheduling expert group meetings during the second half of 2009 to determine ways of streamlining the collection of information and data from Member States.

4. With regard to staffing and resources (paras. 13, 15 and 16), he said that the Scientific Committee's work was being hampered by its reliance on a single professional staff member. An additional P-4 post was required and had been recommended for approval by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. United Nations-supplied resources were small compared with the level of contributions-in-kind by members of the Scientific Committee.

5. On membership of the Scientific Committee (paras. 14 and 17), he said that a number of States had expressed interest in becoming members of the Committee. The Committee was developing evaluation criteria which would reflect the candidate's sustainable knowledge in the field of radiation levels and effects and capability to compile, prepare and evaluate scientific reports, assess draft scientific documents and summarize and synthesize the material for the General Assembly, the scientific community and the public; the criteria would also take into account the availability of expert scientists in the fields of the Committee's work, attendance and participation at Committee sessions, contributions to the work of the secretariat and contributions in kind. Those criteria would be applicable, as far as possible, to both existing and future members. While the Committee was not opposed in principle to the admission of new members, it suggested that the maximum number of members should remain more or less unchanged so as not to compromise the Committee's scientific quality, effectiveness or efficiency.

6. In the strategic plan for 2009-2013, the objective was to increase awareness and deepen understanding among authorities, the scientific community and civil society with regard to levels of radiation and related health and environmental effects as a sound basis for informed decision-making on radiation-related issues. The thematic priorities were medical exposures of patients, radiation levels and the effects of energy production, exposure to natural sources and improved

understanding of the effects of low-dose-rate radiation exposure. In order to better meet the needs of Member States, the Scientific Committee would make a number of strategic shifts, including streamlining processes, enhancing data management, improving results-based management and coordination and raising awareness and improving outreach.

7. The unique work performed by the Scientific Committee afforded Member States the truly apolitical, unbiased science that was essential to making informed decisions on nuclear technology, including nuclear power. Regular, scientific and consensual reports were vital to the work of IAEA, WHO, ILO and users in all Member States. Member States should therefore support a membership policy and budget that allowed the Committee to function effectively.

8. **Mr. Windsor** (Australia) asked what support the Committee members could provide to the Scientific Committee and how the review process could be accelerated to respond to emerging issues.

9. **Mr. Gentner** (Chairman, United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation), said that at the review and data input level, institutional support was strong. However, radiation-science centres were not contributing as many consultants as before and the academics who replaced them did not work as quickly as they might. To overcome that problem, the Scientific Committee was adopting a new document cycle to respond more quickly to separate issues instead of producing very long, time-consuming documents; it would also carry out more intersessional work.

10. **Mr. Hemrå** (Sweden), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania and Serbia; and Armenia and Ukraine, said that the Scientific Committee played an important role in improving international scientific understanding of levels of exposure to ionizing radiation and its health and environmental effects. Its evaluations often underpinned significant actions at the governmental level. One area where further knowledge was required was the effects and risks of chronic low-level exposures on human health and the environment.

11. Given the increasing magnitude, complexity and diversity of the relevant scientific data, the worldwide collection of data on radiation exposure must be streamlined in order to produce high-quality assessments and improve data dissemination. The planned expert group meetings were a positive step in that regard. The European Union reaffirmed its willingness to provide all relevant new information to the Scientific Committee for its consideration.

12. The postponement of its fifty-seventh session illustrated the Scientific Committee's insufficient budgetary and personnel resources. The delay in the issuance of its reports was regrettable and the European Union therefore fully supported the planned expert group meetings intended to help keep the process in motion. The European Union also noted that the need for increased funding had been acknowledged, through the reallocation of existing resources, in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2010-2011.

13. The European Union looked forward to an informed early decision on the membership of the Scientific Committee, including the six observers. It also looked forward to the revitalizing of the Committee through the development of criteria that would ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of its work.

14. **Mr. Vidal** (Uruguay), speaking on behalf of the member States and associated States of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), said that it was regrettable that the shortage of administrative and budgetary resources had caused the postponement of the fifty-seventh session of the Scientific Committee. The MERCOSUR member States and associated States welcomed the possible provision of an additional post to resolve the problem and pledged their support in the General Assembly and, in particular, in the Fifth Committee. They hoped that the Scientific Committee would soon be able to resume its normal pace of work, produce the relevant documents, make up for the time lost and continue to make a valuable and impartial contribution in the field of ionizing radiation.

15. **Ms. Hernández Toledano** (Cuba) reiterated Cuba's firm commitment to the prohibition and total elimination of all nuclear weapons and its complete opposition to the use of nuclear energy for weapons purposes. It was unacceptable that some 26,000 nuclear weapons still existed in the world, over 12,000 of which could be deployed immediately.

16. In view of the importance of the Scientific Committee's work as a source of specialized, balanced and impartial information, its cooperation with Member States and the bodies and agencies of the United Nations

system such as WHO, IAEA and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) must be strengthened to assist it in pursuing its goals.

17. Despite its limited resources, Cuba had provided significant assistance to Ukraine to mitigate the effects of the Chernobyl accident. Over the past 16 years, thousands of Ukrainians, mostly children, had been treated in Cuba as part of a rehabilitation programme which, in addition to its humanitarian goals, had had a major scientific impact. Data had been obtained on the internal effects for children in the areas affected by the accident; that information had been disseminated at scientific events and shared with bodies in the United Nations system, including IAEA and the Scientific Committee. The Committee had cited Cuban studies in publications concerning the after-effects of the Chernobyl accident and had expressed interest in obtaining further data from Cuba.

18. She welcomed the fact that the Scientific Committee would be taking a decision regarding its membership at its fifty-seventh session and reiterated that the applications of six candidate countries must be subject to a comprehensive review without delay.

19. **Ms. Kaminaga** (Marshall Islands) said that the particular case of her country, where the population lived with the effects of exposure to multiple nuclear weapons tests, highlighted the urgent need for comprehensive, unbiased and objective scientific understanding of the effects of atomic radiation.

20. While supporting the work of the Scientific Committee, the Marshall Islands wished to draw attention to the need to consider the responsibility of the United Nations and of the former administering Authority, the United States of America, in addressing the effects of atomic radiation in the Islands. The administering Authority had tested 67 large-scale atmospheric nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands with the explicit approval of the Trusteeship Council. For decades the people of the Islands had spent considerable effort to document the devastating effects of exposure to atomic materials, including through declassified documents detailing deliberate exposure. The effects had continued for generations. Her Government was also concerned about the residual exposure and long-term stewardship of a large concrete storage dome for nuclear material constructed by the administering Authority.

21. Although efforts had been undertaken to remediate environmental damage and to address health and economic issues the response was still incomplete. Science confirmed what the people of the Marshall Islands had long seen for themselves; the United Nations could do much more to facilitate public dissemination and scientific understanding of exposure to atomic radiation for all countries. The scientific definition of safe exposure levels was closely related to the residual fiduciary responsibilities between the United Nations, the former administering Authority and its former Trust Territory, the Marshall Islands; those responsibilities had been reaffirmed in the Communiqué of the Pacific Islands Forum, held in Cairns, Australia, on 5 and 6 August 2009.

22. The international community must show far stronger support for the Scientific Committee, whose work must not be affected by political considerations. Member States should also consider how, within limited resources, the United Nations, and the Scientific Committee in particular, could achieve an improved understanding of the effects of atomic exposure; and should reflect on the United Nations responsibility to the Marshall Islands and facilitate efforts to address compensation and health issues.

23. In view of its remoteness and its limited technical capacity, her Government would welcome assistance in information-sharing and dissemination, including dissemination of the Committee's scientific reports. It would be interested in consultations with the Committee on the preparation of future reports and was willing to provide information relating to the effects of radiation; in view of its limited resources, it hoped that the United Nations would facilitate such efforts. Her Government invited the Committee to visit the Marshall Islands at the earliest opportunity in order to share information and study the effects of atomic radiation.

24. **Mr. Farooq** (Pakistan) said that his delegation believed that the scope of the Scientific Committee's work was only going to increase as new scientific frontiers were explored every day; the promotion of wider knowledge of levels of ionizing radiation and the effects on human beings and the environment was therefore essential. To accomplish that task, the Committee needed the expertise of professionals around the world. Pakistan therefore attached special importance to the issue of the Committee's membership and looked forward to becoming a member, on the merits of its professional expertise in the relevant

disciplines; it was committed to contributing positively to the work of the Committee. It was confident that workable criteria for membership would be formulated during the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Restriction of membership was not consistent with the principled decision of the General Assembly on the subject.

25. In view of the Scientific Committee's important mandate, it was imperative that adequate resources should be provided to it. Pakistan was gratified that the problem of staffing of the professional secretariat had been resolved. It hoped that neither the mandate nor the membership of the Committee would be affected by financial issues, especially when the amount needed was not constraining the overall budgetary allocations of the United Nations.

26. **Mr. Shein** (Myanmar) said that the inability of the Scientific Committee to produce its report on time and the postponement of its fifty-seventh session confirmed that reliance by the Committee on a single professional post was insufficient and adversely affected its strategic plan and programme of work. There was clearly a need for the Committee to be supported in a more predictable and sustainable manner. The Secretary-General should consider all options, including the possibility of internal reallocation of staff.

27. His delegation welcomed the convening of expert group meetings to address the future collection of data relating to public, occupational and medical patient exposure and was heartened that the meetings were to be carried out in coordination with relevant international organizations. It believed that the Scientific Committee should hold annual sessions so that its reports could reflect the latest developments and findings in the field of ionizing radiation and thereby provide updated information for dissemination among all States.

28. Funding for the work of the Scientific Committee must be increased, including through the General Trust Fund for Voluntary Contributions in Respect of the United Nations Scientific Committee on Effects of Atomic Radiation established by UNEP. His delegation shared the view that a solution should be found to the financial issue before any discussion took place in the General Assembly regarding the possibility of expanding the membership of the Committee. It also agreed that an increase in the number of members was not necessarily the best solution to the question of its membership. The financial implications of an increase in membership and of the strengthening of the Committee's secretariat were core issues which must be given careful consideration.

29. **Mr. Taleb** (Syrian Arab Republic) stressed the need for the Scientific Committee to deal with the tasks entrusted to it immediately as well as at its fifty-seventh session, whose rescheduling it welcomed. It hoped that in the meantime every possible step would be taken to increase awareness and understanding on the part of authorities, scientific agencies and civil society of the effects of ionizing radiation on health and environment.

30. His Government's policy was that nuclear technology must be used for peaceful development purposes; moreover, it should not be the object of discrimination, selectiveness or double standards. Syria was therefore concerned about the constraints placed on developing countries' acquisition of nuclear technology for peaceful uses, on the pretext of non-proliferation measures.

31. Syria had always called for the elimination of nuclear arsenals to ward off their hazards and reduce the dangers of atomic radiation. It had been among the first States to call for making the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, and had striven to achieve that goal, acceding to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1969 and concluding a comprehensive safeguards agreement with IAEA. It had participated in many initiatives having that objective, including the submission of a related draft resolution to the Security Council in 2003 on behalf of the Arab Group.

32. The fact that Israel was the only country in the region that possessed nuclear weapons, was not subject to international monitoring and refused to accede to the NPT or apply IAEA safeguards undermined regional and world peace and security and could lead to an environmental disaster of gigantic proportions, in addition to unleashing a dangerous arms race and weakening the credibility of international nuclear non-proliferation efforts. An accident of the Chernobyl type could happen to any reactor. The Governments of the surrounding countries therefore had the right to know the nature of the activities going on in those reactors and whether they were safe or not. The absence of any controls or safeguards for Israeli facilities posed a serious threat to neighbouring States

and the rest of the world. The international community must therefore pressure Israel to place its eight nuclear reactors under IAEA supervision, as required by Security Council resolution 487 (1981), and undertake nuclear disarmament.

33. His Government wished once again to remind the international community of the need to deal with the atomic radiation hazard stemming from the burial of nuclear waste in developing countries or in the depths of the oceans and seas, with dire effects on local populations and the marine environment. In that connection, mention must be made of Israel's burying nuclear waste in the occupied Syrian Golan while the world stood by in silence, thus destroying the basis for trust in anything said or written about preventing nuclear proliferation or the need to respect international agreements on nuclear disarmament. Intensive international cooperation was needed to protect human beings from that deadly hazard.

34. **Mr. Bowman** (Canada) said that Canada had participated actively in the work of the Scientific Committee since its inception. The Committee's function in providing authoritative scientific assessments of the sources and effects of atomic radiation had renewed importance given the current renaissance of nuclear energy. The information provided by the Committee was a vital tool that enabled non-governmental organizations, IAEA, Governments and users of nuclear energy to evaluate radiation risk and establish appropriate safety and radiation protection standards.

35. Despite its crucial work, the Scientific Committee had long faced a mismatch between the challenges it faced and the resources it required. Over time, the Committee had gradually lost financial and secretariat resources. Canada hoped that the current situation would soon be remedied and that increased resources would be made available in 2010. The Committee needed adequate staff to provide backup in the case of illness or absence and to enhance the ability of the secretariat to manage its workload, particularly considering how much more information, data and publications now needed to be taken into account given the impact of the Internet on scientific research.

36. Canada agreed that criteria should be developed to evaluate the ability of Member States to contribute to a strengthened Scientific Committee. While the ultimate decision on membership must be taken by all Member States, his delegation believed that the Committee and the secretariat should be consulted on the application of criteria. Canada supported the development of criteria that would apply to all members of the Committee, to ensure that both current and new members contributed fully to its work, and hoped that the criteria would be developed in time to allow for a decision to take place before the Committee's fifty-eighth session. In the meantime, his delegation strongly hoped that the six candidate countries would be invited to attend the fifty-seventh session as observers and looked forward to having them continue to make a positive contribution to the Committee's work.

37. **Mr. Viinanen** (Finland) said that Finland commended the important work of the Scientific Committee, which also played a prominent role in the wider scientific community. Its work was essential to the international radiation protection regime and to Governments and organizations that relied on the Committee's estimates as the scientific basis for evaluating radiation risk and establishing protective measures. It was therefore vital that sufficient resources should be provided to the Committee and that the problem of staffing should be resolved. His delegation was optimistic that a solution would be found during the current session of the General Assembly.

38. The revitalization of the Scientific Committee would ensure that it maintained its dynamism, scientific quality, effectiveness and efficiency in the future. It was therefore important to develop, with the participation of observer members, objective criteria and relevant indicators to be applied equitably to current and future members of the Committee. His delegation looked forward to approval of Finland's full membership of the Scientific Committee during the current session of the General Assembly, once the resource issue had been solved. It believed that a strengthened membership would be conducive to the revitalization of the Committee and that new members would bring an important contribution to the Committee's work.

39. **Mr. Windsor** (Australia) said that Australia strongly supported the work of the Scientific Committee, which had contributed significantly to a better understanding of the effects of ionizing radiation on humans and on other species, how to quantify radiation exposure and how to assess the impact from various exposure pathways. The Committee had started its work in the context of concern over the testing of

nuclear weapons; fortunately, it had moved on since then and its work was now most vital in understanding the risks involved in new technologies. His delegation reaffirmed the Pacific Islands Forum's recognition of the special circumstances of radioactive contamination of the Marshall Islands and the responsibility of the United States of America towards the people of the Islands.

40. Perspective was important when studying chronic, low-level exposures; his delegation noted that the population dose from diagnostic medical procedures had doubled over the past 15 years and, in developed countries, was now equal to exposures from natural sources; and that, worldwide, radiological exposure from diagnostic procedures was a thousand times the exposure from the nuclear fuel cycle, which had implications for finding solutions to climate change issues.

41. The Scientific Committee's operation depended on the large in-kind contribution from Member States, which collectively provided over 100 scientific experts to participate in the annual meetings, at no cost to the wider United Nations membership. For some time the Committee had been severely hampered by having only one professional post in its secretariat; considering also the need to mitigate the effects of postponing the fifty-seventh session, his delegation would welcome an additional professional post as soon as possible.

42. Australia welcomed the presence of observers at the Committee's sessions. It believed that the sole criteria for membership of the Committee should be sustainable knowledge on a broad range of issues in the field of radiation and the ability to compile and evaluate scientific reports, assess draft scientific documents, and summarize and synthesize the material for the General Assembly, the scientific community and the public.

43. **Mr. Zdorov** (Belarus) said that his delegation has consistently called for reform of the United Nations system and enhancement of the effectiveness of its work. A key part of such efforts should be expansion of the membership of the Scientific Committee, which would help to strengthen the Committee as the main independent scientific body of the United Nations in its field.

44. The Scientific Committee's work was largely dependent on the availability of adequate, stable and predictable funding from the United Nations budget as well as the requisite number of staff. His delegation therefore supported the allocation of additional financial resources to expand the Committee. It also stood ready to make a constructive contribution to discussions aimed at ensuring the provision of sufficient financial and human resources to enhance the effectiveness of the Committee's work.

45. Belarus had always supported the work of the Scientific Committee and attached a great deal of importance to its output. The Committee's reports were used in Belarus for the development of national standards to protect the population and the environment from the effects of atomic radiation. As a candidate for membership of the Committee, Belarus was actively involved in its work; it sent scientists to the Committee's meetings and prepared the necessary scientific materials. Acceptance into the Committee would allow Belarus to make the most effective use of its own unique data and significant practical experience in minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster to work with other members of the international community to achieve full implementation of General Assembly resolution 63/89.

46. **Mr. Karitinski** (Ukraine) said that his delegation was pleased that Ukrainian proposals and data had been reflected in the three annexes published by the Scientific Committee in 2009, which showed the increasing attention being paid to occupational exposure, exposure to naturally occurring radioactive materials and new diagnostic procedures.

47. From the outset, the Scientific Committee had been involved in the evaluation of radiation exposure and health effects of the Chernobyl accident and its impact on the health of several generations, not just those people who were living in the vicinity at the time. Ukraine remained ready to continue its active cooperation with the Committee and all parties concerned in order to counter and minimize the consequences of history's worst nuclear accident through a common scientific understanding of its causes. It was desirable for the Committee to continue to be involved in practical activity, particularly in the calculation of collective doses of radiation. That work had started during the preparatory phase of construction of the new confinement of the Chernobyl reactor and would continue for the next 50 months.

48. Although Ukraine had welcomed the invitation to participate as an observer in the work of the Scientific Committee, the limitations associated with the status of

observer had restricted its ability to receive relevant reports and information from the secretariat and contribute to the discussions during the Committee's sessions, not to mention the decision-making process. Ukraine therefore hoped that the General Assembly would approve its full membership, as envisaged in resolution 63/89. Should its membership not be possible at the current stage because of financial constraints, his delegation wished to continue the practice of attending the Committee's sessions as an observer.

49. Despite the current difficulties in the world economy, the Committee must have sufficient funding in 2010 to be able to carry out its work and implement the strategic plan for the period 2009-2013. His delegation supported the redeployment of resources for the biennium 2010-2011 to UNEP, as announced in the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/478); it strongly believed that UNEP should continue to boost allocations for the Committee, since those allocations had been decreasing in real terms over recent years and were not commensurate with its responsibilities and the need to meet the financial and administrative implications of increased membership.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.