
STATEMENT BY DR. MEBHOOB BEG, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, ON AGENDA ITEM 49 –
EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION IN THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SPECIAL
POLITICAL & DECOLONIZATION [FOURTH] COMMITTEE OF THE 65TH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 28, 2010

Mr. Chairman

I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee to the Sixty-Fifth Session of the General Assembly. I would also like to congratulate former Chairman, the Permanent Representative of Qatar, Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for the way he conducted the work of this committee during the 64th session. I assure you of my delegation's full co-operation and support during this 65th session of the UN General Assembly.



Mr. Chairman

Over the past several years, India has seconded the resolution on the excellent work of, and support for the Scientific Committee, UNSCEAR, proposed by the Member State represented by the Chairman of UNSCEAR. The UNGA resolution no. 64/85 of 19th

January 2010 in its paragraph 13 asked the Committee (UNSCEAR) "to continue its reflections on how its current as well as potentially revised membership could best support its essential work, including by developing, with the participation of the observer countries, detailed, objective and transparent criteria and indicators to be applied equitably to present and future members alike and to report its conclusions". In the 65th General Assembly, India will carefully examine the political issues related to the Committee's stand on New and Potentially Revised membership of the Scientific Committee in the background of the request made by six member states of the UN for becoming the members of UNSCEAR.

Mr. Chairman

Since 2002 some Member States of the UN have been expressing their desire to become the members of the committee. This followed the publication of the 2002 and 2001 reports of the committee and a controversial report by WHO regarding the health effects of Chernobyl accident. Initially, Belarus and Ukraine expressed such a desire. Their scientists were, in fact, invited to the UNSCEAR session in 2000 before finalizing the scientific annex related to Chernobyl accident. They also contributed significantly to the deliberations of its update in 2008. Later, UNGA wanted to know whether any other state was so interested. In response, 6 member states of the UN viz Belarus, Finland, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, Spain and Ukraine expressed their desire to become members of the Committee. For financial and logistic considerations in conducting the sessions with such a large participation, the existing Committee has not been in favour of expanding the membership of the committee. In 2007, UNGA directed UNSCEAR to invite these six states as observers to the committee's sessions.

Mr. Chairman

The UNGA directed the scientific committee further in 2008 to develop detailed, objective and transparent criteria and indicators to be applied equitably to present and future members alike, and to report to the General Assembly.

Mr. Chairman

Before the 57th Session in 2010 which was postponed from April to August due to volcanic disruption of air traffic in Europe, the Chairman of the Committee, and the Vice Chairman, telephonically as well as by email contacted the Distinguished Representatives of the present member states of UNSCEAR including India through the Secretariat in connection with the response to this paragraph of UNGA resolution to develop a kind of consensus in the informal consultations to be held a day prior to the formal session. In earlier informal discussions at the time of the 56th session, the committee had considered several suggestions from the representatives such as continuation of the present observer status of the six new member states desirous of the membership of UNSCEAR, partly permanent and partly rotating membership, mixed delegations on a regional understanding, some members not participating in the

sessions regularly, voluntarily opting out of membership etc. India cannot agree to share its UNSCEAR membership with another nation on a regional representation basis.

Mr. Chairman

The criteria and indicators included in the Committee's report to UNGA this year were evolved through these discussions. Among the criteria discussed was attendance at the session, response to the surveys on exposure to workers and public, natural radioactivity etc., references (scientific articles) cited in the 2006 and 2008 reports of the committee to UNGA. The existing membership was assessed based on these criteria by the Secretariat. Let me underline that this was said to be informal. Six countries that did not fully meet these criteria were requested to make a presentation before the informal meeting of the representatives. Five existing members of the committee, namely, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico and Peru made presentations before the committee to explain their scientific strength and contributions to the working of the scientific committee. The reasons given for asking India to make a presentation was that even though it has proven scientific capabilities in the spheres of the Committee's mandate, India did not provide the requested scientific data (in response to the committee's surveys) for the committee's work at the time of preparation of its 2000, 2006 and 2008 reports.

Mr. Chairman

Dr. K.B. Sainis, Director, Bio-Medical Group, BARC who represented India in the committee expressed India's displeasure during his presentation as well as in all the subsequent discussions during 57th session stating that though he had agreed with the criteria and indicators and to make a presentation, it was beyond the mandate of the committee to single out or name any state and the membership issue was probably a political one. During the 57th session the observer states (6 countries desirous of joining the UNSCEAR) were also asked to make such presentations.

Mr. Chairman

The main reason India did not send the reports was that the formats were not acceptable. The expectations from member states of UNSCEAR, including responding to surveys, creation of a national framework for collection and analysis of important data on radiation exposure due to natural radioactivity, nuclear fuel cycle related activities, medical and industrial uses of radiation, governmental commitment and financial support are understandable. It is, however, possible that not all member states can come on board at the same time or to the same level. Further, information on radioactivity released from different type of reactors, which could be different and yet well within the regulatory limits, can create unnecessary fear in the minds of general public and nations may not like to make it available. Further, security concerns may constrain a sovereign member state to withhold such information in its national interest. These factors should be taken into account in the consideration of the issue. Therefore,

while acknowledging the criteria, per se, India seeks simpler formats of data collection and a non-intrusive approach to it.

Mr. Chairman

There are several areas of re-emerging interest such as radiation induced cataracts, cancer risk due to low dose rate radiation including high natural background radiation, exposures due to internal emitters, paediatric medical exposure etc. Interestingly, while some studies suggest a positive risk for cancer following low dose exposures, studies in high background natural radiation in Kerala related to congenital malformations in newborn children and on cancer risk assessment in the HBR populations in India and China do not indicate an increased risk due to radiation exposure. India would strongly support the new program of work of UNSCEAR that covers these aspects. It is also satisfying to note that while continuously analysing the global data on sources and effects of radiation exposures of the committee is now addressing very specific issues on which scientific documents can be published in a short time.

While seconding the resolution on effects of atomic radiation, India strongly recommends making available sufficient financial resources for its effective functioning.

Thank you Mr. Chairman

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