

to anticipate decisions that will appropriately be taken at a later stage in the Legal Subcommittee and in our parent committee. Permit me, however, to express some preliminary thoughts, as a possible basis for discussion, on the direction and focus of our efforts in this regard.

Let me say, first of all, that we have no wish to comment further in this subcommittee on the particular circumstances of the landing of the *Cosmos 954* satellite in Canada. We have from an early stage been in close touch with the Soviet authorities, who have provided information on the technical characteristics of the satellite that could assist us in the ongoing search from radioactive debris. We have requested further information. We intend to continue to discuss these and other aspects of the incident, including liability and compensation aspects, through bilateral channels. Our concern here is with the general questions posed by the use of nuclear-power sources in outer space.

Satellites carrying nuclear-power sources have on previous occasions been launched by the Soviet Union and by the United States. We understand that, in all, approximately 40 satellites of this kind have been placed in earth orbit or used for lunar or distant interplanetary exploration. This is a small percentage of the total number of satellites placed in outer space. However, because of the potential hazards to mankind and its environment, these satellites pose a number of special questions that should be addressed by the UN and by this subcommittee. The *Cosmos 954* satellite is not the first satellite carrying radioactive materials that has malfunctioned and unexpectedly returned to earth. With any increase in the size and number of nuclear-powered spacecraft in future, the risks would increase. Clearly, the utilization of this technology in outer space calls for special precautions and a special regime of international co-operation designed to ensure the safety and integrity of the human environment.

What is required, in our view, is a measured, realistic and constructive response to the issues raised by this incident. The use of nuclear power in space is a highly-sophisticated and evolving area of space technology. It holds out the promise of important benefits to mankind, as well as posing certain grave hazards. Any consideration of the problem must take into account both the benefits and the hazards, with a full knowledge of the technical background. We must approach the question of the use of nuclear-power sources in outer space in the same spirit in which we approach the question of international co-operation on nuclear-power sources on the ground. There are no easy answers and we are not proposing any hasty action.

The overall objective of our efforts should be to develop a regime for the use of nuclear-power sources in outer space that would ensure the highest standards of safety for mankind and protection for the environment. The obligation to avoid damage or harmful contamination to outer space and the environment of the earth is already enshrined in several provisions in treaties negotiated in the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and other international instruments and principles of customary international law.

In order to carry out the detailed review and technical studies required, we shall be

---