

My Delegation was much impressed, as I am sure others were, by the suggestion of the distinguished Foreign Minister of Norway last week, that there should be some kind of United Nations registration of nuclear test explosions. In my opinion, it is neither necessary nor realistic to contemplate an immediate ban on all such tests. That is our conclusion after weighing the best scientific evidence which we have. But the scientists are the first ones to admit that their evidence is by no means complete or conclusive. They are somewhat reassuring about the present level of radiation in our atmosphere but while the averages appear to be comforting, an overdose in one small locality might occur. Therefore, while we can take limited comfort from the absence of alarming conclusions - or indeed any conclusions - in the interim report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on Effects of Atomic Radiation, it does not seem to me that we would be justified in looking into the future with equanimity. My view is the United Nations should give close attention to the question of nuclear tests and I can assure you that we will support the Norwegian proposal for early and serious consideration of the whole matter.

It seems to me that any agreement on nuclear tests is likely to be in the nature of a compromise. We must be guided by two considerations : we must try to meet whatever may be competently estimated as the requirements of the objective scientific situation and we must enable the needs of defence in a dangerously divided world to be given reasonable satisfaction. Because both of these are indefinite quantities there can for the present time be no facile and final solution, and I do not think we can hope to find a satisfactory arrangement, even of a temporary character, which fails to take into account either consideration. So long as the nuclear powers continue to conduct tests at their own discretion there will be widespread agitation to change the situation, but so long as the proposed solutions exaggerate the importance of one of these two factors and wholly neglect the other they are unlikely to provide an acceptable basis for negotiation.

If we consider what we may hope to achieve in present circumstances, I think we may all conclude that we should try to help the nuclear powers in the first instance to agree that they should set, as a self-denying ordinance, some annual or other periodic limit on the volume of radiation to be generated by test explosions. There would have to be some agreed method of allocating quantities between the powers concerned. To maintain confidence there would also have to be some arrangements for notification of the proposed tests and for their verification - and this need not in my view give rise to insuperable difficulties. A system along these lines might serve for the near future during which it might be reviewed from time to time in the light of the data on radiation hazards which the UN Scientific Committee will be gathering. It would be my hope that in due course this interim measure would be supplanted by a disarmament agreement which would deal in a more definitive way with nuclear weapons as well as other aspects of disarmament.

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