

Statement to the Special Political Committee of the United Nations General Assembly on November 2, 1962, by the Canadian Representative, Mr. Heath Macquarrie.

Just over a year ago, on October 16, 1961, against a background of sharp alarm following on the sudden resumption of nuclear-weapons testing in the atmosphere, the Canadian representative on this Committee stated: "Whatever disagreement or doubt there may be about the level of radiation which would pose an immediate menace to human well-being, the fact that all radiation does present a potential hazard and that higher levels increase this hazard is beyond dispute." The Canadian representative added: "Everything we learn about the nature and the extent of consequences of radiation reaffirms the gravity of the problem. The fact that we have still so much to learn about its long-term effects cannot fail to add to our apprehension."

Since those words were spoken...two important developments have added to our apprehensions for the health and safety of present and future generations. One is the ominous fact that nuclear testing in the atmosphere has, during the last twelve months, been taking place with ever-increasing frequency. The other is receipt by the General Assembly of a second comprehensive report of the Scientific Committee on the effects of atomic radiation. This carefully written and objective report makes it clear that fallout from nuclear tests represents a significant contribution to the total level of radiation to which the human race is exposed. The inescapable conclusion is that such fallout increases the danger of harmful somatic and hereditary effects of radiation for present and future generations.

With the forbearance of the Committee, I shall add a very few figures -- very recent figures -- from Canadian sources. The Canadian health authorities, in their most recent report on radioactive fallout in Canada covering the months of July, August and the first part of September of this year, have revealed that the average concentration of Strontium-90 in milk reached record levels during that period, and that correspondingly high levels of Coesium-137 and Iodine-131 concentrations in milk were recorded. Thus, during the month of July, 1962, the average concentration of Strontium-90 in milk reached 26.5 micromicrocuries per gram of calcium, compared with the national average value for the preceding 12-month period of 10.7 micromicrocuries per gram of calcium. While Canadian health authorities do not consider that such levels as yet require the initiating of precautionary measures, all members of this Committee will, I am sure, agree that the magnitude of the increases recorded is highly disquieting. The firm opposition to nuclear-weapons tests which Canada shares with so many countries has not been strengthened by the conclusions reached in the second comprehensive report of the Scientific Committee. All of my colleagues here are no doubt familiar with the Scientific Committee's disquieting conclusions on this question, which are set out in Chapter VII of the report. One of those important conclusions was that "a final cessation of nuclear testing would benefit the present and future generations



of mankind". It is most significant that this and other conclusions were unanimously accepted by the Scientific Committee, and this on the basis of the most objective and strict evaluation of facts.

This circumstance is a cause both for satisfaction and concern. From the clear and unanimous expression of such important conclusions all of us can derive the satisfaction of being well and authoritatively advised on this vital question of the harmful effects of atomic radiation. The nature of this advice, however, particularly when viewed in the light of continued nuclear testing, is a cause for immediate and deep concern for all those who cannot remain indifferent to the additional human suffering which will result from unchecked increases in radioactive contamination of the environment. The proceedings in connection with the adoption of Resolution 1629 at the sixteenth session of the General Assembly indeed made it apparent that no member of this organization maintains a detached or indifferent attitude on this question.

Last year's resolution, which I have just mentioned, was, in some respects, an advance over those of previous years. It sought to encourage the taking of practical steps, both internationally and nationally, to improve and accelerate the exchange of information on the health hazard of radioactive levels in various parts of the world. More particularly, attention was focussed on the problem of learning more about the incidence, concentration and pattern of distribution of radioactivity throughout the world's environment. The resolution, in its second part, for the first time recommended periodic and regular collection of worldwide data on levels of atmospheric radioactivity. The task of setting up a feasible scheme was entrusted to the World Meteorological Organization for study and implementation.

In view of the prompt and effective action taken at the sixteenth session, the General Assembly is this year faced with the task of consolidating advances made in the light of increased and more authoritative knowledge brought together in the Scientific Committee's second comprehensive report, and in the light of useful studies already made by the World Meteorological Organization in regard to its responsibilities in this field. The fact that nuclear testing is still taking place lends urgency and critical significance to the opportunity we now have to move ahead and to build soundly on the foundations of knowledge laid in previous years. It is with these aims in mind that a large and broadly representative group of delegations has tabled a proposed resolution which has been circulated as Document A/SPC/L.83/Rev.1. It is the hope and conviction of the co-sponsors that our resolution will attract the support of all member states. The vital problems with which it is concerned deserve the fullest weight of international attention and care which can be mustered in this organization.

I think it is generally acknowledged that this second report of the Scientific Committee constitutes the most recent and comprehensive document of its kind in its evaluation of the levels of radioactivity to which mankind is exposed, as well as of their effects on human health. Of equal significance is the fact that such a report represents a tangible and useful product of international scientific co-operation carried out under United Nations auspices. I am sure, therefore, that there will be no dissent from the gratitude and appreciation addressed in the draft resolution to the Scientific Committee, and to all those



who have made a contribution to its work. The sponsoring delegations also consider it appropriate and desirable to have the General Assembly draw attention to the main conclusions reached in the Scientific Committee's report as quoted in operative Paragraph 3 of the first part of the draft resolution. As was done following the presentation of the first comprehensive report four years ago, the first part of our text would also have the General Assembly request the Scientific Committee to continue its task and report to the Assembly in its eighteenth session on its future programme of work. There is much still to be done and we have confidence in the Committee's unique ability to address itself constructively to the remaining tasks of serious concern to the world in accordance with priorities which the Committee itself is in the best position to determine.

The second part of our draft resolution would make it possible for the General Assembly, in the light of the progress report received from the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, to take effective and appropriate action in pursuance of the proposal contained in the second part of Resolution 1629 adopted at the sixteenth session. This admirably comprehensive and succinct report was distributed as Conference Document A/5253, on October 8, 1962. The World Meteorological Organization, in consultation with the Scientific Committee and with the International Atomic Energy Agency, has reached an advanced stage in the elaboration of its plans and it seems desirable therefore to reflect this fact in the draft resolution and to indicate the wish of the Assembly that all concerned should facilitate the progress of the task facing the World Meteorological Organization.

For its part, the Canadian Government has undertaken a review of its own facilities at the national level, which should make possible Canada's joining the plan at an early date following its final acceptance. This procedure is consistent with the attitude taken by the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mr. Howard Green, at the General Assembly on September 25 of this year. Mr. Green then said: "The dangers involved are immediate. They affect us now and, what is even more important, they will affect future generations."

I suggest...that it would be difficult for any of us here to overlook the grim uncertainties which confront our civilization. Is it not, then, eminently sensible that we should use all of the very considerable scientific resources we possess to determine quickly and effectively the nature and degree of the risks involved in artificial contamination of the atmosphere? We cannot do less if we are to accept our responsibility to future generations. We might well do more. It is with these considerations in mind that my Delegation is presenting this resolution, which has been so widely co-sponsored. I hope that it can be unanimously endorsed.





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