



STATEMENT BY MR. VISHVJIT P. SINGH, FORMER MEMBER OF
PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON
AGENDA ITEM 27 : EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION, IN THE
GENERAL DEBATE OF THE SPECIAL POLITICAL AND
DECOLONIZATION [4TH] COMMITTEE ON OCTOBER 16, 2008



Mr. Chairman,

India is appreciative of the noteworthy scientific work being undertaken by the United Nations Scientific Committee on Effects of Atomic Radiation [UNSCEAR], which has considerable implications for the health of thousands of occupational workers and people undergoing radiation treatment, for persons who are living in high natural radiation areas, for the general public, as well as for our environment. We congratulate the Chairman and other

office bearers of the Committee for the able manner in which they have conducted the work of its 56th session in July this year.

India welcomes the strategic plan that has been developed by UNSCEAR to provide vision and direction for all its activities during 2009-2013. This should contribute to heightened awareness amongst all concerned, including civil society and the scientific community, as regards levels of ionizing radiation and related health and environmental effects. We also welcome the thematic priorities for the period that have been identified including, in particular, exposure to natural sources of radiation, and a better understanding of the effects of low dose radiation exposure on human beings.

The Committee scrutinized and approved for publication five scientific annexes at its 55th session in May 2007. These were to have been originally published by 2005. These are long overdue and we await their release, bearing in mind that member states and some organizations rely on the information contained in that report

It is heartening that more member states are seeking to join UNSCEAR. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind the administrative and financial implications on the Secretariat of increased membership of the Committee. It must be ensured that adequate resources are provided to the Secretariat for servicing the Committee in a predictable and sustainable manner.

While the use of radiation for medical purposes such as X-ray examinations, computerized tomography and nuclear medicine, is on the rise in many countries, proper documentation of patient or attendees' exposure and monitoring of these facilities is not being done in many instances. Today medical radiation exposure contributes next only to the natural radiation exposure. In fact for several countries for the first time in history the annual collective and per capita doses of ionizing radiation due to diagnostic radiology have exceeded those from the previously largest source, namely, natural background radiation. In that context, it would be useful to encourage member states that are not doing so to maintain good record keeping mechanisms and adopt requisite regulations regarding medical exposures of patients to radiation.

Mr. Chairman,

It would also be important to undertake a critical assessment of the biological and health effects of natural radiation exposure on a regular basis. Moreover, the adherence to the Linear No Threshold (LNT) hypothesis as a corner stone for radiation protection, would need to be revisited. Central to a

reevaluation of the LNT is the “attributability” of radiation effects. Biological and health effects are very complex and more than one type of agent or signaling process may trigger the same effect, eg., cancer. Non-radiation sources such as smoking, diet, etc, may add to a marginal radiation effect. Thus, the analysis of compounding factors is critical and how much of an effect can be attributed to radiation exposure is a matter of debate. It is good that a debate and discussion has started in the UNSCEAR on this aspect. We would also suggest that cancer-centric consideration of the deleterious health effects of radiation exposure should not overshadow other possible effects such as congenital malformations, in-utero effects and cardiovascular effects, etc., in deciding on exposure limits.

Mr. Chairman,

In accordance with GA Resolution 62/100, we look forward to the comprehensive and consolidated report of the Secretary-General on addressing the financial and administrative implications of increased committee membership, staffing of the professional secretariat and methods to ensure sufficient, assured and predictable funding. This would help in ensuring that qualified and eminent scientists in different areas of radiation effect assessment are engaged.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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