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Chairman: Mr. Franz MATSCH (Austria).

AGENDA ITEM 68

Question of French nuclear tests in the Sahara (A/4183)

GENERAL DEBATE

1. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) hoped that the spirit which had enabled the Committee to achieve unanimity on the subject of disarmament would also prevail during the discussions on the present item.

2. In all civilizations there were people who were reluctant to enter into litigation, even in their own defence. Morocco, which has always favoured the settlement of disputes by peaceful negotiations—sometimes to its detriment—was in just such a position today. It had finally had recourse to the United Nations after having submitted a series of complaints to the French Government, which had been rejected out of hand. Between 24 February and 17 July 1959 five notes had been sent to the French Government in which Morocco had protested against France’s intention to conduct nuclear weapons tests in the vicinity of Moroccan territory and drew attention to the dangers which threatened populations living near the test area. Other African and Asian countries had registered their protests and voiced their concern. But France had maintained its decision, despite resolution II adopted by the Conference of Independent African States at Monrovia in August 1959 condemning the proposed tests, and had merely stated that it would take precautions to protect the inhabitants of the adjacent territories.

3. The Moroccan delegation reserved the right to intervene in the debate whenever it became necessary to enter into scientific details concerning the harmful effects of the tests. First, however, the humanitarian, social and political aspects of the question should be discussed so that it could be viewed in its proper perspective.

4. Morocco had not waited until it was directly involved before condemning nuclear test explosions. It had made its position clear ever since its admission to the United Nations. The attitude taken by the Soviet Union, the United States and the United Kingdom in the matter of nuclear tests had shown a certain sense of responsibility on the part of the rulers and of loyalty on the part of their citizens. But while those countries confined their nuclear tests to their own territories, France proposed to conduct its test in a contested area—the Reggane region. Although the claims had not yet been settled, they were still valid. In any case, the area could not be considered a part of the French Community, and the consent granted by certain parties could not be considered binding over others, who were even more seriously endangered.

5. In a carefully planned press campaign, initiated two years earlier, journalists had been at pains to describe the Sahara as a barren and uninhabited region. But geographically, the Reggane region was situated not in the Tanezrouft desert but in the centre of a wide range of surrounding valleys between south-east Morocco and Mzab, one of the most fertile oasis areas in the Sahara. Both sides of those valleys were rich in palm groves and the area was inhabited by 200,000 persons, who made a livelihood from agriculture, weaving and trade. To the east lay a stretch of irrigated land, rich in palm groves, where 17,000 inhabitants grew dates and a number of other crops and raised live-stock. The fertility of that oasis was not due solely to the irrigation provided by natural watercourses but to intensive efforts at development made in past centuries.

6. Naturally, the intention to conduct nuclear experiments in that unique green zone had evoked considerable dismay. It was hard to understand the assertions that such a populated and vital area was nothing but a barren desert which could not be seriously damaged by an atomic explosion.

7. The statement that precautionary measures could be taken to avoid the harmful effects of the tests was equally puzzling. There seemed to be no evidence that atomic science had progressed far enough to make it possible to eliminate the long-term—if not the immediate—dangers. Those precautions no doubt entailed the forcible transfer of the inhabitants of the area and their permanent resettlement elsewhere. France would have to carry out the same measures that the United States had taken in the case of Bikini and Eniwetok, but on a far larger scale. Apart from the inhumanity of such a course, it was hard to justify it on legitimate grounds and, even if it were feasible, it would not prevent the destruction of all animal and plant life in the area.

8. Scientists, who had initially been concerned with external radiation, had now established that certain radioactive substances, such as strontium-90, could cause internal radiation. It was generally agreed that that substance was not present from natural causes, but as the direct outcome of nuclear explosions.

9. Furthermore, scientific data showed that, fortunately, atmospheric contamination was not serious in all fallout zones. However in desert regions, owing to the lack of heavy rainfall, radioactive dust was not washed away. It was estimated that, if tests were continued at the same rate as they had been conducted before 1955, the maximum permissible dose would soon be reached. It was also known that strontium-90 was deposited by rain on the leaves of plants, from which it was transmitted to the soil, and that plants...
thus infected might be used to feed domestic animals or even for human consumption. Milk and dairy products also served as a vehicle for strontium–90 in addition to calcium. Recent studies showed that the level of concentration in small children was ten times higher than in adults. Thus, a minute quantity of that substance accumulated in vegetable or animal substances was bound to prove dangerous.

10. Unfortunately, the geographical and climatic conditions of the Sahara made it particularly susceptible to danger. The shortage of rainfall meant that slow fall-out reached the ground with a maximum radio-activity content. The density of vegetation around the oasis meant that the radio-activity was retained and transmitted to the soil. Exposure to such highly radio-active substances could cause cancer. The staple foods of the inhabitants of the Sahara, such as milk and meat, were all highly susceptible to contamination by fall-out, which could easily be spread by means of the water supply. High trade winds could carry contaminated sand over considerable distances. Last but not least, radio-active particles could be carried by grasshoppers over a large area.

11. It was doubtful whether adequate precautions could be taken even if all living beings were evacuated before the test. The experience of the explosion at Hiroshima and similar ones had shown that the after-effects were not necessarily felt during or even immediately after the event. The kinetic and thermal effects were of limited duration and their scope could easily be determined, but the process of radio-activity, which occurred in two stages the second of which involved the pulverization of fissionable material, could not be so easily controlled. The fall-out, which would be slow, could be carried by rains and winds and could contaminate the animal and vegetable world long after the explosion. The human victims were not necessarily killed outright, but often remained deformed for the rest of their lives, and large numbers of babies were still-born.

12. It might be contended that the number of fall-out victims represented only a small per cent of the world's population and that the explosion of a further bomb would not substantially increase the present quantity of radio-activity. But that would be begging the question, just as it would be to say that the danger was reduced by precautions or that there was a permissible dose.

13. The disastrous consequences of nuclear explosions were generally realized, but the French experts said nothing on the subject and paid no heed to the protests of the people of Africa.

14. France wanted its bomb, apparently as a matter of prestige. It seemed that atomic power had become the criterion for authority in international affairs. While no one would wish France to occupy an unworthy place in the international field, the African States none the less had their own interests and prestige to protect. While appreciating France's desire to strengthen its position, they could not allow the bomb, which was to be the instrument of that policy, to be exploded on African territory. In the past Africans had made sacrifices which had helped France to achieve military successes. Today Africa had chosen its own destiny, which it wished to pursue in peace and prosperity. France, however, seemed not to have abandoned its former policy of domination. For France, Africa had been a credit on which it had drawn in the past and on which it believed it could still draw. France could still have a credit in Africa, but only with the freely-given consent of the Africans themselves. By refusing to heed the Africans' unanimous plea that the test should be forsworn, France was mortgaging a promising future.

15. Mr. MOCH (France) said that his delegation would reply at the end of the debate to the observations made by other representatives on the projected French nuclear test. He wished to thank the Moroccan representative for having presented calmly, effectively and courteously a matter to which his Government attached much importance but which, the French representative believed he could demonstrate, was by no means as serious as had been maintained. He would not comment on the territorial claims referred to by the Moroccan representative, inasmuch as the subject under discussion was that of nuclear tests and, in any event, the General Assembly was not competent to deal with the matter. The Moroccan representative could not expect the General Assembly to impose some conciliation or arbitration procedure or to adopt a resolution on such a matter.

16. Turning to the substance of the debate, he said that it was very difficult to argue a case when objections of an emotional nature were brought against it and when arguments based on reason, science or even common sense encountered statements founded on hearsay, preconceived ideas and rash generalizations from erroneously extrapolated scientific data. In the absence of a general agreement on nuclear disarmament applicable to all without distinction, France was unwilling to submit to discriminatory treatment.

17. Moreover, since it created no danger for the rest of the world and, in particular, for Africa, France's action in equipping itself with nuclear weapons was a matter that concerned only the French people and had no place in a United Nations debate.

18. However, those representatives who showed particular alarm, because of their countries' geographical position must be shown in a serious, objective, scientific manner, although in everyday language, that their fears were unjustified. The "undeniable danger" to which the Moroccan representative had just referred did not exist.

19. He wished to state at the outset that the French test involved a very small amount of energy in comparison with those conducted previously by other Powers. The energy released by the United States, Soviet and United Kingdom explosions, taken together, had increased in very rapid progression. The average annual amount of energy released had levelled off at about 110,000 tons of TNT during the seven years from 1945 to 1951. When the atomic age had given way to the thermo-nuclear age it had suddenly increased, fluctuating between 10 and 12 million tons over the years 1952-1957. It had finally risen to 30 million in 1958. Thus, since 1945, an amount of energy totalling more than 91 million tons had been released in 207 tests, of which 131 had been carried out by the United States, 55 by the Soviet Union and 21 by the United Kingdom.

20. To those totals, the increase in which was alarming the world even though they had not produced an appreciable rise in the level of radio-activity, the French testing would add less than 100,000 tons, i.e.
less than one one-thousandth of the total energy already diffused in the atmosphere and stratosphere and less than three one-thousandths of the energy released in the year 1958, when the records both for the number of explosions and for the amount of energy released by them had been broken. The French testing was thus a virtually negligible factor, which France had no wish to increase.

21. Turning to the radiation effects of the proposed test, he pointed out that man was exposed to two types of natural radiation, namely cosmic and terrestrial radiation, and two types of artificial radiation, namely that deriving from the use of medical X-ray apparatus and certain other sources and that caused by the postwar nuclear tests.

22. The first type of radiation, which was of stellar origin, varied according to latitude and, in particular, altitude. Its intensity at sea level, at the latitude of Paris and Montreal, amounted to 28 units (millirads) per year, rising to 48 at an altitude of 1,500 metres (4,920 feet). The units referred to in what he had just said, as in what was to follow, were genetic doses, i.e. doses capable of causing mutations.

23. The second type of radiation, that of terrestrial origin, was more intense and varied more sharply according to location. Its annual average intensity was 78 units; but the figure was, for example, three times as great on the granitic soil of French Brittany and eighteen times as great in the monazite areas of the Indian state of Kerala, which because of its rich thorium deposits, was the most highly irradiated place in the world. Those basic facts were modified according to the different types of dwellings; to move from a frame house to one made of brick or concrete meant increasing the dose by some 20 units in the United Kingdom and Austria—by about 40 if the new home was made of granite—and as much as several hundred in the villages of Kerala, where terrestrial radiation in the region of 3,000 units per year had been registered.

24. The average intensity of the first type of artificial radiation was 57 units per year in France and twice as much or more in the United States; single doses were sometimes extremely high. A single fluoroscopic examination of the abdomen caused the absorption of a substantial dose of radiation, from the genetic standpoint: 64 units in the case of an adult and nine times as much in the case of an embryo. Luminous watches subjected the body to a total irradiation of 25 units per year, apparently without harmful effect to the wearer.

25. The radiation caused by the nuclear explosions carried out between 1945 and 1958 had resulted in an additional dose averaging 2 units for the northern hemisphere as a whole, which was subject to the heaviest irradiation: a figure equivalent to the increase in cosmic-ray intensity to which a person was subjected if while on a walk he climbed 215 metres (705 feet) above sea level—an ascent which no one regarded as injurious to health.

26. The French testing, since the energy it would release would amount to less than one thousandth that already released, would be equivalent to an additional two one thousandths of a unit, or the increase in cosmic radiation which would result from a rise in altitude of about 20 centimetres (7.8 inches)—the height of one step in a flight of stairs.

27. Thus, man was exposed to total radiation, both natural and medical, which, while varying greatly in intensity, averaged about 150 units annually, although in some parts of the world it was as high as 3,000. Past nuclear explosions had added an average of only 2 units to the total, and the French test would result in a further increase of only two one thousandths of a unit. But the annual dose which was commonly regarded as completely harmless, even for children and embryos, was 500 units. For adults, the safe dose was 5,000 units per year. Thus, the dose of natural radiation received without danger by all humans, including embryos, was 250 times as great as that produced by all past explosions and 250,000 times as powerful as that which would result from the French testing.

28. The same applied to doses of strontium-90, to which the Moroccan representative had referred; strontium-90 was a fission product whose density was strictly proportionate to the amount of energy released by the given explosion, and would therefore be as negligible as the total radiation which, he had indicated, would be caused by the French testing.

29. All the figures cited had been taken from the report of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (A/3838) and the report on fall-out prepared in May 1959 by the United States Atomic Energy Commission.

30. With regard to the possibility that the Sahara test would produce particularly high concentrations of fall-out in the surrounding area, all necessary precautions would be taken. Even if it was assumed that a wind with the unusually high velocity of 28 kilometres (17 miles) per hour was blowing at all altitudes up to 12,000 metres (7 1/2 miles), a person who remained within a distance of 150 kilometres (93 miles) downwind from the test site or up to 15 kilometres (9.3 miles) at right angles to it for an indefinite period after the test explosion would absorb fewer than 2.5 units (millicuriecs) of radiation; and it was considered safe for French atomic-energy workers to absorb as many as 3 units over a period of thirteen weeks and 5 in a year. Evacuation of the people living in the vicinity of a nuclear establishment in France was considered only when there was danger of exposure to 25 units, i.e. ten times as much as in the pessimistic hypothesis just suggested.

31. In any case, the area within a radius of 150 kilometres from the prospective test site was in fact totally uninhabited; the long Touat chain of oases ended far from the site chosen for the testing, part of the Tanezrouft area, the Desert of Thirst, which the nomads had avoided from time immemorial. A single track, built by France, skirted the area; elsewhere, only special vehicles were able to penetrate. The track, which was already guarded, would be closed to traffic, and the whole of the tremendous proving ground would be guarded. The possibility of anyone’s remaining in the area he had described for an indefinite period of time, or even for a prolonged period, was therefore a purely theoretical assumption of something that could not possibly occur. As to the question of radio-active particles diffused by the power of the fire-ball rather than by the wind, at the Australian proving ground at Maralinga no appreciable radioactivity carried in that manner had been found beyond a radius of 22 kilometres (13.6 miles) from the test site.
32. It could thus be said that air and land surveillance before and after the explosion would be so strict—in a region which was, in any event, virtually uninhabited—that it would be impossible for anyone to enter the restricted Sahara proving ground by accident. The boundaries of the area had been laid out in such a way that no one outside it would be exposed to any danger. France was familiar with the necessary precautionary measures and knew how to apply them. Although France had unfortunately had its radiation victims, such cases had occurred among scientists and doctors who had handled X-rays at a time when their effects had not yet been well known, not among the 13,200 workers of the Atomic Energy Commission, among whom there had been no accidents.

33. Comparing the United States, Soviet and French test sites, he pointed out that between 1951 and 1955 numerous explosions, of which forty-five had released small or medium, amounts of energy, had been carried out at the United States proving ground in Nevada, which, like the French Sahara proving ground, was situated in a desert. The large cities near the test area included Las Vegas, with 45,000 inhabitants, at a distance of 118 kilometres (73 miles), and the Los Angeles metropolitan area, with 4 million inhabitants, at a distance of 400 kilometres (248 miles); there were over 10 million urban inhabitants living less than 1,000 kilometres (621 miles) from the test area. Yet, despite the fact that the latter included two sectors with favourable winds, the forty-five explosions set off between 1951 and 1955 had, in the six years that had followed, produced an increase in radio-activity varying only between 0.015 and 1.3 units in the cities situated between 50 and 100 kilometres (31 and 62 miles) from the test site, between 0.11 and 0.16 unit in those at a distance of 500 to 1,000 kilometres (310 1/2 and 621 miles), and between 0.006 and 0.05 unit in those at a distance of more than 1,000 kilometres, i.e., as far from the test site as Morocco was from the intended French test site.

34. Similarly, the Soviet Government had carried out numerous nuclear tests in the Lake Balkhash area of the Soviet Union, despite the fact that the area included two sectors with favourable winds and that there were two cities with a population of 100,000 each (Rubtsovsk and Semipalatinsk) at about 100 kilometres from the test site and a total urban population of 10 million within a radius of 1,000 kilometres; that information was based on readings made by the Detection Division of the French Atomic Energy Commission. The Soviet Government had not published information on the Lake Balkhash tests comparable to that provided by the United States Government on the Nevada explosions. It could be assumed, however, that the Soviet Government had had no more desire than had the United States Government to expose the large population in the surrounding area to the highest risk, and that the increase in radio-activity was as negligible in Siberia or Kazakhstan as in the American states adjoining Nevada.

35. The seven test explosions set off at Maralinga had also produced a negligible increase in radio-activity outside the restricted area. He pointed out that, contrary to the assertion of the Moroccan representative, it had been demonstrated that the absence of rainfall tended to reduce radio-activity and that desert areas were therefore the most favourable for nuclear tests.

36. In contrast to the density of population in the area of the United States and Soviet test sites, there were no more than a few thousand inhabitants within a radius of 500 kilometres of the projected French site and only one sizable population centre, with 19,000 inhabitants, within a radius of 1,000 kilometres; it was only beyond that distance that the population became relatively dense: in the Tlemcen area of Algeria to the north and the Fez and Marrakech areas of Morocco to the northwest, all of which were much further from the Sahara site than were Los Angeles and San Francisco from the United States test site or the big Siberian cities from the site north of Lake Balkhash. Finally, further security was provided by the fact that weather forecasting was easier at the French site than at the United States or Soviet sites. Hence, conditions were clearly more favourable at the Sahara test site than at the Nevada and Balkhash sites, and the projected French testing would create no danger for anyone.

37. It should be added that, according to separate studies conducted by the National Meteorological Division of the French Ministry of Public Works and Transportation and by the Meteorological Office of the United Kingdom Air Ministry, there were virtually no prevailing winds capable of carrying radio-active particles 1,000 kilometres to the south, west or north of the Sahara site. Such particles could be carried only towards the east, where they would fall to earth four to ten hours after the explosion, in a desert area at a distance of between 150 and 600 kilometres (93 and 372 1/2 miles) in doses which would give no cause for anxiety; any such particle which travelled beyond that distance would have virtually no effect.

38. The fear aroused by nuclear tests was unquestionably genuine and even to some extent understandable, even though the opposition to testing had originally been created by systematic political propaganda. However, he had demonstrated that the effects of the French testing would be negligible in comparison with those of previous nuclear explosions. Governments had to educate public opinion and follow the dictates of reason, not yield to collective fears.

39. Some had wondered why France was preparing to carry out its atomic explosion in the Sahara rather than in some distant Pacific Island. It had been decided to conduct the French test at the Sahara site because the latter had the advantage of being much closer to France and of being a desert area. His Government would not have hesitated to conduct a test in metropolitan France if it had been possible to find a sufficiently large uninhabited and waterless area there for the purpose.

40. Some sincere friends of France had expressed the fear that, by acquiring possession of the atomic bomb, France would forfeit the friendship of the peoples of Africa. He found that argument moving, but not valid. Human reason must be trusted, regardless of geography. Once the test had been carried out, the fever would abate when everyone saw that life was continuing just as before and that nothing untoward had happened. France would therefore regain its friends, if they were in fact turning away at the present time; they would return when their anxiety had passed and they realized the emptiness of their fears and, perhaps, the bad faith of those who had inspired them.
41. It had also been asserted that France was incurring special responsibility by reason of the fact that it was to carry out its test at a time when the three present nuclear Powers were negotiating an agreement on the discontinuance of nuclear tests. His reply was a simple one: so long as the world remained in a state of agonizing insecurity and continued to pursue the arms race, every State had the right—and every Government had the duty—to ensure the protection of its country. That applied to France as to other countries.

42. As the French representative had stated before the United Nations in 1946,1 the mission originally assigned by France to its Atomic Energy Commission had been exclusively a peaceful one. France had remained faithful to that policy for nearly ten years, in the hope of setting an example to the rest of the world, but its example had not been followed, and in the insecure state of the present-day world France could not remain without modern weapons. He was certain that the French testing would have no effect on the outcome of the present conference on the Discontinuance of Nuclear Weapons Tests.

43. It should be borne in mind that in terms of energy released the French test would be in the class of the small explosions set off in Nevada and Kazakhstan rather than of the considerably more powerful tests conducted in the Pacific and in Novaya Zemlya.

44. France did not wish to add to the number of such tests unless it was absolutely necessary. But underground tests, which gave off virtually no radio-active particles, were of very great scientific and technical interest. Some day, probably in the near future, they would make it possible to carry out excavation work for harbours, canals and inland seas without danger and at reduced cost; to build dams; to make deserts fertile—the Sahara, in all likelihood, first of all; to bring petroleum deposits into production and to transform the low-yield product of bituminous schists by heating and making fluid the oil contained in them with a view to pumping it direct instead of extracting, with great difficulty, twenty or thirty times the tonnage of stone with a very small hydrocarbon content. France therefore hoped later to carry out underground explosions.

45. The French people unanimously desired peace with disarmament. France would enthusiastically abandon all military tests as soon as the three original nuclear Powers renounced their nuclear weapons. If those Powers agreed to halt, under international control, the production of fissile materials for military purposes, to begin the reconversion of their stockpiles and to do away with nuclear weapons carriers—in short, to give up their de facto monopoly—France would at once follow suit.

46. Nuclear disarmament for all was France's specific, permanent, fundamental objective, for that alone would ensure the complete equality of peoples. If the fact that France was becoming the fourth State to liberate the explosive energy locked in the nucleus of the atom should cause the three others to take the urgently necessary action of eliminating nuclear weapons, its present efforts and the researches of its scientists would, without fear of the verdict of history, have made a major contribution to the cause of peace.

47. Mr. ZEINEDDINE (United Arab Republic) said that the position of his delegation with regard to France's intention to detonate an atomic bomb in Arab North Africa was consistent with its basic policy: it supported the complete cessation of all nuclear and thermo-nuclear tests, and the conclusion of international agreements banning the development and use of nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons. France's intention of becoming a fourth nuclear Power might encourage other countries to develop nuclear weapons, thus exposing the world to an ever-growing danger. Paradoxically, the decision of the French Government to proceed with its test had been taken at a time when international developments had created a most favourable atmosphere for agreement between the great Powers on the cessation of tests and a relaxation of the arms race.

48. The French bomb was to be exploded on non-French territory in Africa, notwithstanding the emphatically declared opposition of the African States. Among the areas which would be affected were Trust Territories and Non-Self-Governing Territories for whose welfare the United Nations had assumed special responsibility. It was therefore fitting to discuss the question as a separate issue, particularly since some States tended to confuse it with the general question of disarmament and to argue that international action on it should be made contingent on progress in the settlement of the wider question of disarmament.

49. The motives which had prompted France to undertake the development of nuclear weapons at the present juncture in international relations were to some extent reflected in statements recently made by the President of the French Republic, by its Prime Minister, and now by its representative in the Committee. On 20 August 1959, General de Gaulle had said that the test was to be undertaken for the prestige and defence of the French Community. Mr. Deoré, the French Prime Minister, had explained on 16 August 1959 that it was necessary, to avoid being "crushed" by agreements between the other great Powers, and to carry greater weight in shaping international arrangements on such vital issues as disarmament, the German question and North Africa. France was in fact reverting to the outworn thesis that the achievement of a balance in armaments among the major Powers was a prerequisite for the settlement of outstanding political problems. While it was patently too late for France to reverse the current trend of international developments towards simultaneous action on disarmament and on reconciling political differences as manifested in the resolution unanimously adopted by the Committee, its attitude was clearly not designed to further that objective.

50. The French plan to test an atomic bomb confronted the United Nations with the necessity of decid—
ing whether, in the prevailing improved international atmosphere, it should countenance a wider dissemination of weapons of mass destruction and an increase in French military power, especially as international agreements were being negotiated on matters involving France, as one of the great Powers, and indirectly involving other Member States. The latter should be in a position to express their views before such agreements assumed final form. The United Nations should also be concerned at France’s attempt, by means of the proposed test, to translate military power into international political power in defiance of the principle of international co-operation.

51. France’s apprehensions regarding possible agreements between the three nuclear Powers seemed to indicate a reappraisal of NATO and the cold war. Surely those apprehensions were unfounded; great-Power agreements would not be "crushing" to France, to North Africa or to any other country. They would presumably be limited to problems of legitimate concern to the parties, and France should not regard a successful nuclear test in North Africa in a political weapon in negotiations, or seek to block great-Power understanding. Moreover, the French assertion that the test was intended to strengthen the defence and prestige of the French Community could be viewed with misgivings; while it might be designed to gain strength for France in Africa, it would not help towards a solution of the Algerian question, or influence the thinking of the peoples concerned. Peace in Algeria could be achieved only by negotiations between the two parties directly involved.

52. The explosion of an atomic bomb in the Sahara carried with it the risk of the physical contamination, by fallout, not only of the surrounding area of Africa, but of the Mediterranean countries as well. In Africa, at least, the necessary health facilities for the treatment of radiation effects did not exist. Furthermore, the bomb was likely to be of the same type as that dropped on Hiroshima and more than one test might be carried out. The Africans would not, however, be the sole victims. The effect of the test would be to contaminate Europe too, if not physically, at least morally and politically. It would bear an overwhelming burden of guilt, and, just as the first bomb at Hiroshima had led to other and more powerful bombs, so the first French bomb might lead to the dissemination of nuclear weapons among other European nations, and, ultimately, to other parts of the world. The time might come when only a few countries had no bombs or were free from alignments with those who possessed them. The projected test would diminish the prestige of France without strengthening its defence. France would gain greater international sympathy by cancelling the test and withdrawing from an atomic race in which it could not anticipate much success. At a time when the former colonial peoples were emerging as free and independent nations, France was seeking to bring to bear what remained of its influence as a colonial Power. In the minds of the Asians and Africans, the detonation of the French bomb would have an adverse effect on the attitude of all countries directly or indirectly supporting current French policy in North Africa and elsewhere in Africa.

53. The declared intention of France to detonate a bomb in the Sahara had already precipitated a strong movement of opposition. In September 1958, the League of Arab States, meeting at Casablanca had unanimously decided to adopt as its own the item proposed by Morocco which the Committee was now considering. A month earlier, the Conference of Independent African States, meeting at Monrovia, had denounced the decision of the French Government to carry out the test. Previously, a number of African States had protested against the test through diplomatic channels, and even Nigeria, which had not yet become a sovereign State, had expressed its apprehensions. When all those efforts had proved futile, Morocco had brought the matter to the United Nations (A/4183). Its objective was to persuade France to desist from the test and to abide by the principle of international co-operation in the matter.

54. France obviously hoped to delay United Nations action until the test had been carried out. It would presumably put off the test if other States suspended their testing indefinitely, if existing stockpiles of bombs were destroyed, if the production of nuclear and thermo-nuclear weapons were banned, if control satisfactory to France were established, if the other great Powers refrained from negotiating agreements which were not to France’s liking, and, finally, if all those conditions were fulfilled before France detonated its bomb. The United Arab Republic had no quarrel with most of the objectives enumerated and would have liked to have had France on its side in past United Nations deliberations on nuclear weapons. Surely, it would have been more logical for France to decide to defer its test pending the outcome of the forthcoming negotiations on the cessation of tests and on general and complete disarmament.

55. Spokesmen for France had given the General Assembly assurances that the precautions surrounding the bomb test would absolutely eliminate all risks of physical contamination, and that the decision to hold it had been unanimously approved by the Executive Council of the French Community. Those assurances raised the question whether it was scientifically possible to assert that no physical harm would be done by the test, and whether the approval by the Executive Council represented a conviction based on a thorough and free exchange of views in a competent organ. If the answer to the second question was in the affirmative, it would add no strength to the French position; it would simply mean that the whole French Community bore responsibility for the test. If the approval had been automatic and had been extorted by French colonial influence, it would weaken the French position. The factor which France should take into account was the legitimate opposition of the independent African States. With regard to the first question, Sub-Committee A of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean had adopted a resolution protesting against any attempt by France or any other country to explode a bomb in North Africa on the grounds that the resulting atomic fall—all would endanger health, and had appealed for a ban on the test.

56. Even assuming that the projected test would not do great physical harm, its moral and political effects could not be discounted. The only precaution to be taken against those effects was to cancel the test. The United Arab Republic sought a recommendation by the General Assembly which would effectively dissuade France from carrying through its plan. It would join in sponsoring and in voting for a resolution to that effect. Such action by the United Nations would be
consistent with the Charter principle of establishing harmony in relations between States and promoting international co-operation.

57. Mr. MOCH (France), exercising his right of reply, pointed out that the reference by the representative of the United Arab Republic to Algeria had been out of order; Algeria was not the item at present before the Committee. Moreover, it was false to insinuate that France feared agreement between the nuclear Powers: France would be quite satisfied to see those three Powers abandon testing after having carried out so many nuclear tests. However, so long as there was no agreement on genuine disarmament with regard to nuclear weapons, the French position remained unchanged. The moral contamination of the world to which the representative of the United Arab Republic had alluded would be the result, not of the innocuous French experiment, but of a campaign of panic and exaggerated political propaganda. France would continue to support comprehensive disarmament, of which nuclear disarmament was an integral part. The representative of the United Arab Republic would recall the series of French and Franco-British disarmament proposals laid before the United Nations and its organs since 1951. France was prepared to give up armaments as soon as agreement was reached on nuclear disarmament. Lastly, it should be noted that the WHO Sub-Committee to which Mr. Zeineddine had referred was composed solely of Arab States; its findings had been based on political and not on scientific considerations; they were part of the political campaign which he had mentioned earlier.

58. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) said that he would reply fully to the French representative at a later stage in the debate.

59. Mr. ZEINEDDINE (United Arab Republic), replying to the French representative, said that the main issue behind the test was not inter-Arab politics, but international politics. Perhaps the French position had changed since the Prime Minister of France had declared that his country did not wish to be "crushed" by agreements between the other major Powers. If, as the United Arab Republic believed, France wished to avoid international agreements which might be detrimental to it, its decision to test a bomb in the Sahara should be viewed in the light of all its interests and his reference to Algeria was therefore wholly relevant. France's attempt to enhance its international political power by increasing its military power would affect the Algerian position, especially since there was a real prospect for a solution through negotiation. The United Arab Republic had endeavoured to assess the French intention to detonate a bomb in the Sahara from an international point of view. That was why he had stressed its political and moral effects, rather than its physical consequences. He reserved the right to discuss the scientific aspects of the question more fully at a later stage.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.