UNSCEAR's activities and issues

This information paper has been prepared by the secretariat of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR)\(^1\) for the 44\(^{th}\) meeting of the IAEA Radiation Safety Standards Committee (6–8 June 2018). It is based on the Committee’s annual report\(^2\) to the United Nations General Assembly which was discussed at the its 64\(^{th}\) UNSCEAR session and presented to the Fourth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on 2 November 2017. Furthermore, it takes into account the preparation done for the upcoming 65\(^{th}\) UNSCEAR session, which will be held from 11–14 June 2018.

SIXTY FOURTH SESSION OF UNSCEAR

The Scientific Committee has held its 64\(^{th}\) annual session in Vienna (29 May–2 June 2017). Hans Vanmarcke (Belgium) served as Chair; Peter Jacob (Germany), Patsy Thompson (Canada) and Michael Waligórski (Poland) as Vice-Chairs; and Gillian Hirth (Australia) as Rapporteur.

The Committee approve two session documents and as scientific annexes for publication underpinning findings that were reported to the UNGA this year, namely:

A. Principles and criteria for ensuring the quality of the Committee’s reviews of epidemiological studies of radiation exposure; and

B. Epidemiological studies of cancer risk due to low dose-rate radiation from environmental sources.

In 2014, the secretariat had established a mechanism to closely follow and review scientific literature related to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident with an intent to publish the findings regularly as a “White Paper”. At its 64\(^{th}\) session, the Committee discussed the third “White Paper” in which literature up till the end of 2016 was reviewed. The document entitled “Developments since the 2013 UNSCEAR Report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the nuclear accident following the great east-Japan earthquake and tsunami (2017 White Paper)” was approved at the session and was issued as a non-sales publication in English and Japanese.

The Committee also approved a White Paper on the evaluation of thyroid cancer data in regions affected by the nuclear power plant accident at Chernobyl in 1986. This paper was published in April 2018.

The Scientific Committee also discussed the following documents intended to be parts of future UNSCEAR Reports:

1 The United Nations General Assembly established the Scientific Committee in 1955 to assess and report levels and effects of exposure to ionizing radiation. The Assembly designated 27 countries to provide scientists as members of this high-level Committee. The Committee’s programme of work is approved by the Assembly, and is in a process of transition from extending over a 4–5 year period to a rolling portfolio of projects. The secretariat, which is provided through arrangements with the United Nations Environment Programme, collates data from Member States and other international organizations, and engages specialists to analyze information, study relevant scientific literature and produce scientific reviews for scrutiny at the Committee’s annual sessions. The Committee also reports its findings annually to the General Assembly, which provides unique access to the highest level of decision-making in the UN system.

2 A/72/46
1) Selected evaluations of health effects and risk inference from radiation exposure;
2) Exposures of patients to ionizing radiation;
3) Exposures of workers to ionizing radiation;
4) Lung cancer from exposure to radon and to penetrating radiation; and
5) Biological mechanisms influencing health effects from low-dose radiation exposure.

FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK

The Committee discussed plans for new projects on: (a) Second primary cancers after radiotherapy, (b) Epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer, and (c) a revision of the 2013 UNSCEAR Report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the 2011 Fukushima accident. A proposal to evaluate human exposures to natural radiation sources was received positively, however, the Committee decided to postpone project initiation until its report on lung cancer from exposure to radon and to penetrating radiation was completed, and more extensive data on human exposures from natural sources in different parts of the world became available.

UNSCEAR’S OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

Based on the Committee’s Public Information and Outreach Strategy (2014–2019)\(^3\), the UNSCEAR secretariat has translated the “2017 White Paper” following up on its 2013 Report on the Fukushima-Daiichi accident into Japanese and launched it in Tokyo, Japan on 27 October 2017. This third White Paper on this subject continues the ongoing effort to systematically monitor and evaluate relevant, new scientific information. Further, the secretariat finalized the translation of the UNEP booklet *Radiation: Effects and Sources*\(^4\) into ten languages including the official languages of the United Nations. They were officially released on 2 November 2017.\(^5\) Further, a press release was launched on the occasion of the 32\(^{nd}\) anniversary on the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident and several interviews were conducted.\(^6\)

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\(^3\) UNSCEAR/61/7

