UNSCEAR Activities and Updates

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 47th meeting (20–22 November 2019) of the IAEA’s Radiation Safety Standards Committee (RASSC). The paper summarizes the Committee’s report to the United Nations General Assembly\(^2,3\), which was presented to the Fourth Committee on 24 October 2019, reflecting the discussions of the UNSCEAR 66th session (10–14 June 2019).

**UNSCEAR’S SIXTY SIXTH SESSION**

The Committee held its 66th annual session in Vienna (10–14 June 2019) and attended by 148 participants from 25 Member States, 8 international organizations and 4 observer countries. A new Bureau was elected: Ms Gillian Hirth (Australia) served as Chair; Ms Jing Chen (Canada), Ms Anna Friedl (Germany) and Ms Jin Kyung Lee (Republic of Korea) as Vice-Chairs; and Mr Ingemar Lund (Sweden) as Rapporteur. The 67th session of the Committee is scheduled for 13-17 July 2020.

The Committee approved two documents as scientific annexes for publication as part of the UNSCEAR 2019 Report underpinning the scientific findings that will be reported to the UN General Assembly, namely:

A. Evaluations of selected health effects and the inference of risk due to radiation exposure; and

B. Lung cancer from exposure to radon.

Further, the Committee discussed the following documents intended to be approved at the Committee’s 67th session and published as scientific annexes of the UNSCEAR 2020 Report:

1) Levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station: implications of information published since the 2013 UNSCEAR report;

2) Evaluation of medical exposure to ionizing radiation;

3) Evaluation of occupational exposure to ionizing radiation; and

4) Biological mechanisms relevant for the inference of cancer risks from low-dose radiation.

The Secretariat has set up expert groups for two new projects endorsed by the Committee, that commenced work in the third quarter of 2019:

1) Second Primary Cancer after radiotherapy; and

2) Epidemiological studies of radiation and cancer.

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\(^{1}\) 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. 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 analyse 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 (www.unscear.org)

\(^{2}\) https://undocs.org/en/A/74/46

UNSCEAR’S AD HOC WORKING GROUPS

The Committee agreed that in order to implement its current and future Programme of Work to extend the Ad Hoc Working Group on Effects and Mechanisms\(^4\) for another year. It also agreed to establish an Ad Hoc Working Group on Sources and Exposure\(^5\). Both groups operate during the inter-sessional period and report to the Bureau. The Ad Hoc Working Group on Sources and Exposure is led by Ms J. Chen (Vice-Chair) and the Ad Hoc Working Group on Effects and Mechanisms is led by Ms A. Friedl (Vice-Chair). These working groups are currently working on proposals to be presented to the Committee at the 67th session.

UNSCEAR’S FUTURE PROGRAMME OF WORK

The Committee considered its future Programme of Work for the 2020–2024 period and agreed that very high priority should be given to start a study on diseases of the circulatory system and exposure to ionizing radiation. The Committee discussed several other topics, classified as high priority by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Effects and Mechanisms. The Committee agreed these to be considered in the future, subject to completion of ongoing projects and further literature reviews.

The Committee also asked the Secretariat to establish an Expert Group on Public Exposure that will develop a project proposal for consideration at the 67th session. Regarding future assessment of public exposure from discharges, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) agreed to cooperate with the UNSCEAR Secretariat in data collection and evaluation. Nominations for this working group have been received and the Expert Group will be established before the end of 2019. On 15-16 October 2019 the Secretariat discussed with the IAEA the most appropriate means to collaborate on this UNSCEAR project and to use the updated IAEA’s DIRATA\(^6\) database for the Committee’s planned evaluation of public exposure to ionizing radiation.

UNSCEAR’S OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

The Committee endorsed the Secretariat’s proposal for a new strategy on public information and outreach activities for the 2020–2024 period. This includes a detailed implementation plan, which complements the planned Secretariat’s outreach activities on the update of the UNSCEAR 2013 Report on the levels and effects of radiation exposure due to the accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station, planned for approval at the 67th session of the Committee in 2020.

The Committee welcomed the online publication of the updated UNEP booklet entitled “Radiation: Effects and Sources” (which is intended as information for the public)\(^7\) in all the official languages of the United Nations, and in five other languages as well. The Committee encouraged the Secretariat to further promote this work.

A press release was launched on the occasion of the 66th session.\(^8\)

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\(^4\) UNSCEAR/65/10/Attachment
\(^5\) UNSCEAR/66/7/Attachment
\(^6\) Database on Discharges of Radionuclides to the Atmosphere and the Aquatic Environment - https://dirata.iaea.org/
\(^7\) http://www.unscear.org/unscear/en/publications/booklet.html
\(^8\) http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/en/pressrels/2019/unisous408.html
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