I.A.E.A.: General Debate

The South African Delegation was requested to open the General Debate in the plenary session of the current Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Copies of the statement I made on this occasion are attached for the record.

The points in the statement which attracted attention were:

(i) The fact that South Africa has the highest known reserves of uranium-oxide, approximately 15 times more than Canada and 22 times more than the United States.

(ii) Proposals to produce heavy water.

(iii) The emphasis placed on the importance that the Agency function primarily as a technical Agency, with political consideration excluded as far as possible.

(iv) The function of the Agency as the organization primarily responsible for the co-ordination of international activities in the field of peaceful uses of atomic energy.

Copies have also been sent to London, Washington and State Information.

Chargé d'Affaires

Enclosures

RESUBMITTED

Paul 2/11/1957
STATEMENT DELIVERED BY MR. B.J. SWAN
MEMBER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN DELEGATION AT THE
SECOND MEETING OF THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE FIRST GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

MONDAY, 7TH OCTOBER, 1957

Mr. President:

It has been South Africa's good fortune to have been closely associated with the planning of this Agency, since the time when eight countries of which South Africa was one, consulted together, following President Eisenhower's initiative at the United Nations, in order to negotiate the establishment of an international organisation to promote the peaceful uses of atomic energy. We have, therefore, had ample opportunity to make our contribution, both at all stages, to the evolution of the programme which is now before the General Conference for discussion. My Government is satisfied that the recommendations of the Preparatory Commission provide a prudent and adequate guide to the Agency in the determination of policy in its initial years. Since, however, the programme recommended by the Preparatory Commission is to be discussed in detail in Committee, I shall limit my intervention in this debate to a few matters of more general interest.

Before mentioning these, however, it is my pleasant duty and privilege to offer my country's congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your unanimous election to your important office. We are confident that your wise counsel, and diplomatic skill and experience, will enhance the prestige of this Conference and help to start the Agency from the outset on a course where patience, moderation and goodwill will be the guiding lights in the resolution of the many problems that lie ahead.

My next duty is to pay tribute to the untiring efforts of the Austrian Government both to make this first General Conference a success, and to ensure that all possible facilities which a host country might reasonably be expected to provide, are placed at the disposal of the Agency. Since my arrival in Vienna in July, I have been able to observe the enthusiasm and vigour which the various authorities of the Austrian Government have brought to the task of providing the privileges, amenities and every other form of facility, which constitute a corollary to the establishment of the headquarters of the Agency in this lovely city. The co-operation and the good-will which the Austrian Government have displayed at every turn, the energy and efficiency they have shown in responding to requests made to them, and the generosity which has accompanied all their gestures, have evoked the warmest admiration of my delegation. In this context we wish also to pay special tribute to the Executive Secretary of the Preparatory Commission. To him too, we are...
It is also perhaps worth noting that production of uranium is not confined solely to uranium. While its special significance is small in scale, it is already an important product of the industry. Preliminary estimates of up to 100 tons of usable supplies have been set.

The potential for uranium and thorium is not to be overlooked. Our Government has shown a remarkable amount of interest in these materials and has been active in developing them.

With respect...
With respect to radio-isotopes the demand has grown steadily since their first introduction to South Africa in 1948. Present consumption is mainly devoted to medical applications, but we expect that application to industrial and agricultural purposes will increase rapidly. In the field of agriculture extremely useful work has already been done and the isotope unit of the Cape Western Province Fruit Research Section has made valuable contributions in the special sphere with which it is concerned.

South Africa believes that in its early years, perhaps the most important contribution the Agency can make towards the development of most member countries will be in the field of radio-isotopes. We ourselves have taken some initiative in this respect so far as Africa south of the Sahara is concerned. Under the auspices of the Scientific Council for Africa a specialist regional conference on the uses of radio-isotopes took place in Pretoria in July. It was attended by experts from British, French, Belgian and Portuguese territories in Africa, from the Central African Federation and from Ghana, as well as from South Africa itself. Observers were present from the United Nations and the World Health Organisation. The conference discussed the need for a number of important problems relevant to the control, uses and distribution of radio-isotopes in the African region, south of the Sahara. Recommendations submitted to Governments included the establishment of plans for the training of scientists in the uses of radio-isotopes and the establishment of panels of correspondents to ensure adequate exchange of information within the region.

The second sphere in which we believe the Agency can play an especially valuable role in its early years is that of training. We in South Africa are only too conscious of our own shortage of expert personnel and are allocating a high priority in our own atomic programme to remedy these deficiencies. But we shall do what we can to assist others who may be less fortunately placed than we are. For example at the conclusion of the Radio-Isotopes Conference to which I have referred, the President of the South African Council for Scientific and Industrial Research informed the delegates that his Council would welcome guest workers from other countries. In fact we have always been ready to grant research facilities to guest workers from other countries, particularly at our Universities and at the Government Metallurgical Laboratory. Just before I left South Africa in July, we were happy to welcome two scientists from Japan who were given every facility both in Government Institutes and in the private laboratories of our uranium industry.

I have said enough in this brief survey to sketch how important it is to South Africa that this Agency should become a real success, and during the long preparations which have preceded the convening of this General Conference South Africa has endeavoured to play its part in laying the proper foundations of a successful organisation.

Among the factors we regard as essential to such success, the most important is that this Agency should be primarily a technical Agency. Political considerations, of course, cannot and should not be excluded from the functioning of an organization of this character; but they should be allowed
Undue emphasis on political considerations can also lead to overburdening the Secretariat with a top-heavy bureaucratic structure thus undermining the provision in Article VII C of the statute that the Agency’s permanent staff be kept at a minimum and Article VII D requiring that the paramount consideration in the recruitment of staff should be to secure employees of the highest standards of efficiency, technical competence and integrity. My delegation is not unaware of incipient trends of thought tending to subordinate secretarial efficiency and economy to considerations of politics and prestige, - trends which, if carried much further, may make it difficult to assemble a really effective Agency staff. We firmly believe that one of the reasons for the successful functioning of the Preparatory Commission’s Secretariat was the achievement of Dr. Jolles in limiting the number of executive heads to what he felt to be the minimum requirements for efficient administration. We commend his example to his successor.

If the Agency is to function successfully as a technical Agency, it must also command respect among the world’s scientists, economists and technical experts. This means not only that the technical staff should have qualifications comparable with corresponding staff in national administrations, but that the Agency’s method of operations should also command respect. In certain fields the Agency has functions analogous to those of the International Bank and I feel we might do well to model many of our operational methods on those of the Bank - an international institution whose prestige has grown steadily with the years. The operational methods of the Bank are particularly relevant to the implementation of Article II of our Statute.

Another factor which we regard as of essential importance to the successful functioning of the Agency is the proper co-ordination of the activities of the various inter-govern-mental organisations, both regional and international, which are concerned with the peaceful uses of atomic energy. Nothing will more detract from the effectiveness of a planned approach to the problems before us than the emergence of a growing number of inter-governmental organisations seeking to compete with one another in popular appeal, duplicating one another’s functions, building up vested interests in one sphere or another and in the process occasioning not only wasteful expenditure, but dissipating the all too few resources of technological manpower the world has at its disposal.

South Africa recognises that the United Nations in particular, as well as a number of other organisations, have special and individual contributions to make, but we believe
I phoned Mr. Brink (Atomic Energy Board Office) in connection with the report which appeared in the press that this Agency should be used by Governments as the international body primarily concerned with problems of co-ordination in the field of policy. The responsibility for ensuring this co-ordination rests, of course, not on the Secretariats of the various organizations, but on Governments. In respect of a number of common administrative problems the executive heads of the various Secretariats, assembled for example in the A.C.C. under Mr. Hammarskjöld’s chairmanship, have an important role to play. These executive heads can also provide most valuable advice, but in the co-ordination of policy it is the Governments themselves which must take the decisions, not the Secretariats. It is, therefore, tremendously important that Governments adopt a common policy in respect of all related organizations of which they are members.

Finally, my delegation would urge that the Agency adopt as its watchwords: patience, moderation and goodwill. Patience, because it will inevitably be sometime before the Agency will be able to realize all the brave hopes which attended its birth; moderation, because the Agency is so easily susceptible to political exploitation; and goodwill, because without it the Agency will never become anything more than an empty husk. These watchwords served us well in the Preparatory Commission. Let us enshrine them at the heart of the edifice we are now attempting to construct.