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REPORT ON THE PREPARATORY WORK OF THE  
UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
FOR DEVELOPMENT

by

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## Background

In the United Nations system, the functions of Science and Technology have been discharged mainly by the specialized agencies. Indeed, the now more than thirty specialized agencies, UN bodies and regional economic commissions have at least a part of their activities related to science and technology. The first attempt to link the science and technology activities of the UN system with the main stream of the scientific thinking was made in the years 1958 to 1960 through a systematic "Survey of Current Trends in Scientific Research" (Auger report) which was undertaken under the joint auspices of the United Nations and UNESCO. The Scientific Advisory Committee of the United Nations subsequently took the initiative to propose a first "international technical conference of governments". This Conference was convened in 1963 in Geneva under the title "United Nations Conference on the Application of Science and Technology for the Benefit of the Less Developed Areas".

## Results of the<sup>1963</sup> Conference:

The Conference strengthened the belief that the effective application of science and technology could contribute substantially to the acceleration of the development of the developing countries. There also emerged the conviction that the Conference could lead to positive action on a scale commensurate with the objectives of the First United Nations Development Decade. The inherent weakness of this well-intentioned Conference was that the representatives of the scientifically advanced countries outnumbered by four to one those from the more numerous less developed countries. The Conference which was attended by 1,665 participants and during which 1,839 papers were presented, resulted rather in a state-of-the-art presentation of the various scientific disciplines without resolving the methods needed to couple these findings to the development process of nations.

Follow-up

The most visible follow-up of the Geneva Conference was the creation of the United Nations Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development (ACAST). This body consists of 24 permanent, high level experts who represent many scientific, economic and social disciplines. The members of ACAST are appointed in their personal capacities.

At the same time a staff unit called "the Office for Science and Technology" was established within the United Nations Secretariat itself. Part of its functions is to assist the various organizations of the United Nations system in coordinating their science and technology activities.

World Plan of Action

One of the major contributions of the Advisory Committee on the Application of Science and Technology to Development to the strategy of the Second United Nations Development Decade was the World Plan of Action for the Application of Science and Technology to Development, from which also regional plans have evolved. The World Plan is chiefly a generalized statement of priorities and principles for introducing industries and technical services into less developed countries.

Proposals for a new conference

In 1974, the Economic and Social Council had emphasized the necessity for a <sup>second</sup> conference and recognized that the new needs in the field of science and technology made it imperative for the United Nations to expand international co-operation in the field of science and technology on the basis of principles designed to adjust the scientific and technological relationships among States in a manner compatible with the special requirements and interest of developing countries. These recommendations were taken up by the Seventh Special Session of the General Assembly in September 1975 which specifically recommended that a United Nations Conference on Science and Technology should be held. The need for a unified, integrated and interrelated application of the totality of man's potential knowledge and ability (science and technology) to the totality of interacting needs has also been put forward as justification



for a second international conference on science and technology.

Participation and Purpose of the Conference ; Scope and Priorities

The purpose of the conference should be to produce decisions and action by Governments, individually and in co-operation. To achieve this it is essential that at the final and highest level the participants should be ministers who carry the responsibility for planning and development in their Governments and who have authority to influence decisions on basic policy issues. But in the context of the Conference, the instruments of action are science and technology and it is therefore equally essential to ensure that the scientific community of all the countries taking part is intimately and actively involved in all phases of the preparations and in the Conference itself. Such a close association between Governmental decision makers and scientists is in any event a sine qua non at the national level for the successful application of science and technology to development.

It is also essential and the Conference could play this role, to bring together not only activities and aims of the world's scientific and technological community but also within the United Nations system itself the relevant activities of its component parts.

The Advisory Committee emphasized that the Conference should interpret "development" broadly. It should not be restricted to economic and social development in the technical sense but should embrace the need to realize to the full human aspirations for achieving the highest quality of life. The approach to the conference must therefore be on a multidisciplinary basis. On the other hand, the work of the conference must not be at such a conceptual or theoretical level that its recommendations do not have practical outcome at the national level, particularly in the developing countries.

## Objectives

The objectives of the Conference, have been defined as follow:

- to adopt concrete decisions on ways and means of applying science and technology in establishing a new international economic order;
- to strengthen the technological capacity of developing countries;
- to adopt effective means for the utilization of scientific and technological potentials in the solution of problems of development; and
- to provide instruments of co-operation to developing countries in the utilization of science and technology for solving socio-economic problems that cannot be solved by individual action.

## Agenda

The provisional agenda of the Conference is focusing on the following main items:

- the choice and transfer of technology together with the elimination of obstacles to the utilisation of knowledge and methods for the integration of science and technology in economic and social development;
- institutional arrangements and new forms of international co-operation in the application of science and technology including the expansion of institutional systems in developing countries; research and development in industrialized countries of importance to developing countries; exchange of information and the promotion of co-operation among developing countries;
- better utilization of the United Nations system and other international organizations; and finally,
- science and technology and the future.

### Involvement of non-United Nations bodies

It is felt that the purpose of the Conference will be greatly enhanced at the world, regional and national levels by the active support and participation of the various governmental and non-governmental bodies.

In this context it would appear to be particularly important that the expertise of the scientific and technological world community be fully utilized. It is hoped that the current and proposed work programmes of these various bodies will reflect their involvement in the solution of the objectives of the Conference.

### Time frame

The Conference will be convened in 1979. It will be preceded in 1978 by a series of regional meetings in Africa, Asia, Western Asia, Latin America, Europe and North America. In 1977, all participating Member States of the United Nations are expected to prepare national position papers reflecting their experience and expectations of the role of science and technology within the development process of the given country. It is also foreseen that out of this national evaluation process, specific subject areas will emerge which will form the basis for subsequent regional and world deliberations.

It has been suggested that National Committees for the Conference be created in each country which intends to participate, in order to build up interest in the Conference and serve as focal points in generating and co-ordinating action at the national level.

Organization of the Secretariat

The Conference Secretariat will be headed by a Secretary-General and will consist of the United Nations Office for Science and Technology as well as staff members seconded from the specialized agencies and other United Nations bodies.