



## General Assembly

Thirteenth Session

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### First Committee – Disarmament and International Security

This committee aims to create a more peaceful world. Talks in this committee center around reducing weapons in the world. It also identifies threats to peace and finds solutions to international security.

This committee believes the world can become stable through cooperation. Countries can protect their people better if they work together for peace. For example, this committee might discuss how to keep weapons from terrorists. Or, how less weapons can make the world safer. Also, countries talk about policing weapons and finding ways to reduce the weapons they have.

**First Committee** works closely with **United Nations Disarmament Commission** and **Conference on Disarmament**. They have passed resolutions on ammunition, military spending and missiles.

### Agenda Item 99.E – Prohibition of the dumping of radioactive wastes

#### Focus Questions

Radioactive materials can be positive for human development. However, when it becomes waste it is a human health problem. With your fellow delegates you need to find a solution to the problem of radioactive wastes.

- Can states agree on a plan in order to dispose of radioactive wastes safely?
- What steps can countries take to limit their production of radioactive wastes?
- How can countries support or encourage each other to live up to treaties?

#### Background

Radioactive materials releases radiation. Many elements are found naturally that are radioactive: uranium, potassium and thorium. When humans discovered all the uses for these radioactive elements we began to be more exposed to radiation. This is because humans found that using this energy could make their lives easier. Now, 14% of the radiation humans are exposed to every year comes from man-made sources.

Some of the positive uses of radioactive materials are x-rays, creating energy and cleaning medical equipment. However, it has military uses as well. In World War II the United States developed the atomic bomb. It was dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It killed hundreds of thousands of people and people were affected negatively by the exposure to radiation for months and years afterwards.

Radioactive materials are not 'bad'. They have uses which can help us. However, once we are finished using them their waste continues to be dangerous. We need a better solution than just dumping it into the environment.

Uranium is a very powerful radioactive material used to make energy. But, mining uranium for nuclear power plants and preparing it takes a lot of energy. Is this a good use of resources? Also, after the uranium is used to power the plant it is still radioactive. Uranium-235, has a half-life of 703.8 million years! That means it will take that many years for it to be **half** as radioactive.

Because radioactive materials are dangerous for so long, actions that happened years, decades or even millions of years ago still have an effect today. Radiation humans create today will be a problem for countless generations in the future. Therefore, governments need to find a place to store radioactive waste for thousands of years or find some other way of making it safe or stop making it at all.

In 2011, the Mainichi daily, a Japanese newspaper, reported on talks between the US and Japan to build a nuclear waste storage facility in Mongolia. Mongolia was going to store used nuclear fuel. They could then recycle that fuel to be used again, but some waste would need to be stored. The people of Mongolia, however, were not happy that their country was going to be used to store nuclear waste. They protested the plans and the government decided they would not complete the plan. Mongolians did not want to live near nuclear waste even if the government promised it could be stored safely. Especially if it was coming from another country!

Many other people around the world do not want a nuclear recycling plant or waste plant near where they live. In China, thousands of people from the city of Lianyungang protested a plant to recycle nuclear fuel. In 2018, France had to use police to get rid of protesters who were blocking a site that was going to be used to store nuclear waste. People living near the San Onofre Nuclear Station in California do not like that over 4000 tons of waste is stored there. It can damage the environment and the health of people living nearby if an accident were to happen.

However, countries need to find solutions to their nuclear waste issue. Many ideas involve getting it far away from humans. Until 1993, 13 countries dumped nuclear waste in the oceans. This was finally banned by international agreements. States did this because they thought the ocean was a better place to store it than on land. However, the more people thought about it the more they realized that dumping waste in the oceans could just create a much bigger problem in the future. However, in 2018, countries will be allowed to look into the sub-seabed solution. Waste could be pushed deep into the ocean floor if countries can come to agreement about whether it is safe.

Some companies have been taking advantage of the fact that Somalia does not have a government that can enforce rules and its borders. Since the 1990s ships have been dumping radioactive materials off the coast of Somalia. In 2005, a tsunami broke barrels full of radioactive waste and it made people along the coast sick. Also, there is fear that the radiation might harm local fish stocks.

Another problem with nuclear waste is that it could be used to create a dangerous weapon. States worry that terrorists could get nuclear waste and use it to make a 'dirty bomb'. This type of bomb would use a regular explosive to spread nuclear waste. In 2013, two thieves stole a truck in Mexico that was carrying nuclear waste. Police do not think they knew there was nuclear waste in the truck but this shows it needs to be guarded very closely.

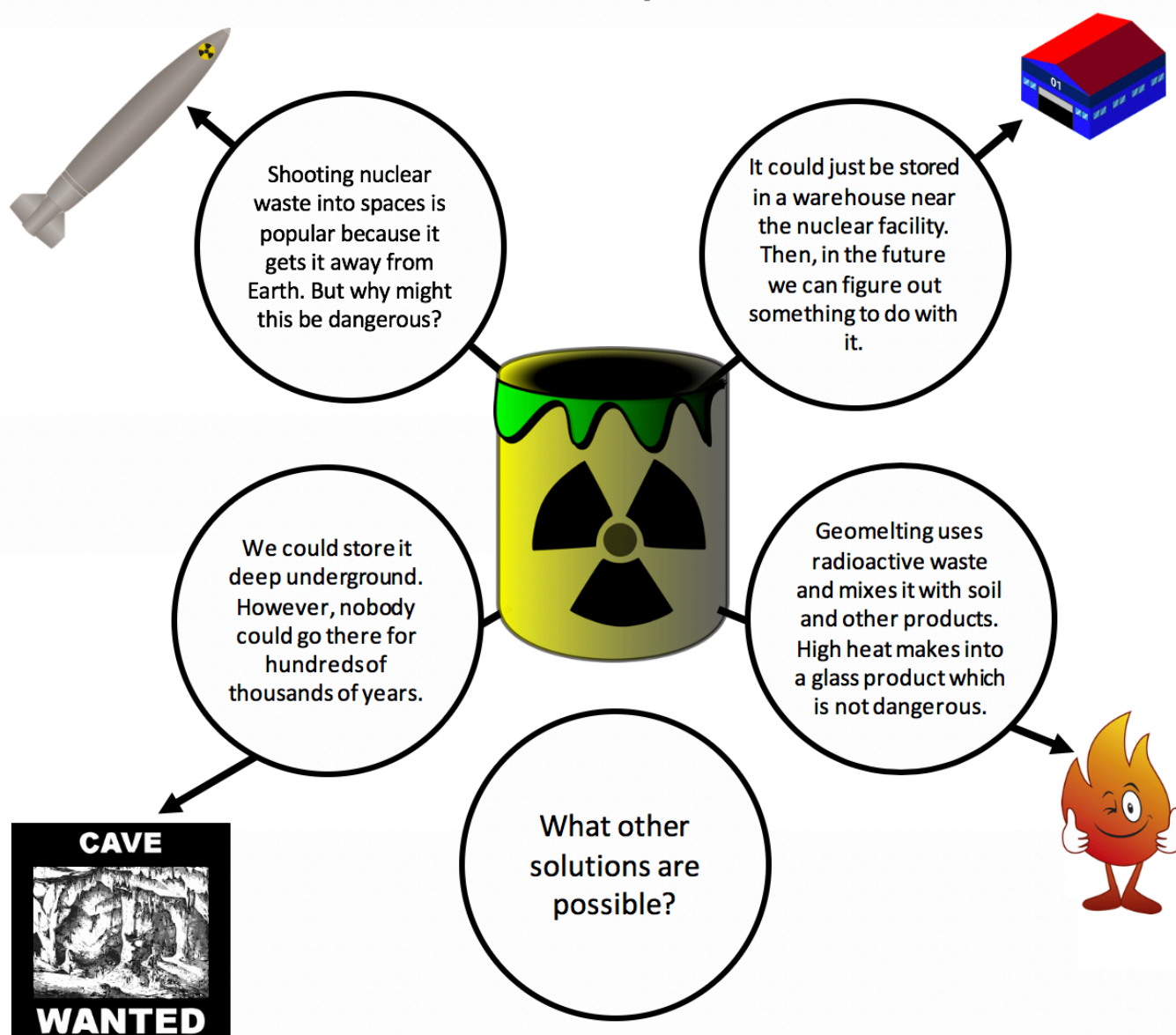
In 1983, a radiotherapy machine was abandoned in Goiânia, Brazil. Thieves stole it and ended up infecting 250 people with radiation. Four people died.

**London Convention**

This is an agreement that works to protect the world's oceans from pollution. It was created in 1972. It covers all waste that is dumped into the sea from a plane, boat, or platform. It does not cover, however, dumping that starts from land (for example from a pipe). In 1993 it helped ban the disposal of radioactive wastes at sea. There are now 89 members of this Convention.

**Basil Convention**

This treaty tries to stop dangerous wastes from moving from one country to another. In the 1970s many developed countries made strong laws protecting the environment. This made it more expensive to take care of dangerous waste. There was a danger that richer countries would export their waste to poorer ones. It came into force in 1992 and has 186 members.

**Nuclear Waste: Disposal Methods**

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## Research Questions

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1. Does your country create any nuclear waste? Does it have any nuclear power plants?
2. Do your county's neighbors produce nuclear waste? How could this negatively affect your people?
3. Would it ever be possible for all countries to stop producing all radioactive wastes or will making some wastes always be necessary?
4. What are the pros and cons of nuclear energy?
5. What are some of the other technologies that produce nuclear waste? What can be done to limit the waste they produce?
6. How can countries work together to prevent nuclear accidents or exposure to radioactive waste?
7. How does this issue affect developed and developing countries differently?
8. Does the problem exist in your community?
9. Who is working on it? NGOs, not for profits, other groups or individuals?
10. Knowing about this problem, how does it impact your world view?
11. How could you make an impact on this issue through your life choices?

## Resources

Title	Hyperlink	How is it helpful?
<b><i>United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs</i></b>	<a href="http://www.un.org/disarmament/">http://www.un.org/disarmament/</a>	Provides broad information about disarmament.
<b><i>International Maritime Organization</i></b>	<a href="http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/LCLP/Pages/default.aspx">http://www.imo.org/en/OurWork/Environment/LCLP/Pages/default.aspx</a>	Information on the London Convention which banned dumping waste in the sea.
<b><i>Greenpeace</i></b>	<a href="https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/victories/a-ban-on-dumping-radioactive-waste-at-sea/">https://www.greenpeace.org/usa/victories/a-ban-on-dumping-radioactive-waste-at-sea/</a>	An article on Greenpeace's perspective of how dumping waste was banned.
<b><i>Nuclear Monitor</i></b>	<a href="https://www.wiseinternational.org/nuclear-monitor/735/no-international-spent-fuel-storage-mongolia">https://www.wiseinternational.org/nuclear-monitor/735/no-international-spent-fuel-storage-mongolia</a>	An article about the US and Japan wanting to store nuclear waste in Mongolia.
<b><i>ABC News</i></b>	<a href="http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-19/steketee-nuclear-winner:-the-case-for-storing-nuclear-waste/7184650">http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-19/steketee-nuclear-winner:-the-case-for-storing-nuclear-waste/7184650</a>	Arguments stating why nuclear waste should be stored in South Australia.
<b><i>New York Times</i></b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/09/world/asia/china-nuclear-waste-protest-lianyungang.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/09/world/asia/china-nuclear-waste-protest-lianyungang.html</a>	Protesters in China are against a nuclear waste project that is near them.
<b><i>CBRNE Portal</i></b>	<a href="https://www.cbrneportal.com/the-disposal-of-nuclear-waste-into-the-worlds-oceans/">https://www.cbrneportal.com/the-disposal-of-nuclear-waste-into-the-worlds-oceans/</a>	Information on the dumping of radioactive wastes into the sea.
<b><i>The Atlantic</i></b>	<a href="https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/10/the-sub-seabed-solution/308434/">https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1996/10/the-sub-seabed-solution/308434/</a>	Information on storing nuclear waste in the seabed.
<b><i>The Economist</i></b>	<a href="https://www.economist.com/news/international/21720591-finland-shows-way-project-expected-span-100000-years-how-dispose">https://www.economist.com/news/international/21720591-finland-shows-way-project-expected-span-100000-years-how-dispose</a>	Different methods of dealing with nuclear waste and the countries involved.