



WELLINGTON

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ANTARCTIC RESOURCES: EFFECTS OF MINERAL EXPLORATION

(Note by Chile)

The wording of the above subject has produced the liveliest concern in the Delegation from Chile, and this has increased as they have become aware of the draft recommendations submitted by some of the Delegations and the opinions expressed in the general debate on this item.

Mention has been made of the urgent need of authorising commercial exploration in mining, and of the pressure that certain companies would exercise with this end in view. Every kind of opportunity has been offered to study a future agreement on the economic exploitation of the Antarctic, including the political and administrative sequels.

We are facing an extremely grave problem which could put an end to the Antarctic Treaty, bringing to light once more the troubles over sovereignty, creating problems of jurisdiction and opening up rivalry and discord which we believed had been buried for ever as a result of the Antarctic Conference in Washington in 1959.

In that year Antarctica was given a special and unique statute. Nuclear experiments and military manoeuvres were banned in that continent, and it was dedicated to scientific research for the good of all mankind. With the object of contributing to such worthy ends, 12 countries made mutual concessions and the document then signed has been praised as a model of good sense, ahead of its time, and has served as an inspiration in the solving of various other international problems, such as those of outer space and of the sea beds.

Antarctica is today an enormous laboratory where outstanding men of science work, spread over more than thirty permanently occupied stations.

But now it is said that it is a matter of urgency for the commercial prospecting of minerals to be authorised, although it is recognised that the exploitation of these minerals would not take place for "several decades" yet. It has even been remarked that if these interested companies are hovering round the Antarctic they are doing so, not from a world-wide need of the minerals, but rather because of reasons of a speculative character, or because they need to "keep busy".

Antarctica is the only continent set aside as an area for special conservation, and agreed measures for protecting the flora and fauna are stringent. With the intention of maintaining this situation, seven countries agreed to freeze their rights to sovereignty or their territorial claims. The exercise of economic activities, in this case mining, would destroy the delicate balance reached in Washington, and those seven countries could no longer be asked to maintain that particular judicial position, at the very moment that economic operations were changing the whole situation brought about by the Antarctic Treaty of 1959. The previous status quo would be re-born.

The Chilean Delegation declares its unshakeable adherence to the Antarctic Treaty, and is opposed to anything which might change or discredit it. We are confident that, however great may be the power of the international economic groups interested in exploiting the Antarctic Continent for lucrative ends, the power of the 12 countries that took upon themselves the responsibility for protecting Antarctica for future generations is greater still.

Chile will do everything in her power, in accordance with the Preamble of the Antarctic Treaty, "that Antarctica may continue to be used always and only, in the interests of all Mankind, for pacific ends and may never become the subject of international discord". For this end she will use the means which the Treaty itself supplied in Article X: "Each one of the Contracting Parties undertakes to make the necessary effort, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, to make sure that no one carries out in Antarctica any activity contrary to the purposes and principles of the present Treaty."