

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
Substantive session of 1997

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COVENANT ON ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Initial reports submitted by States parties under
articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant

Addendum
SRI LANKA

[5 March 1996]

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Development of science and technology

363. Most of the functions mentioned under these points are covered by Act No. 78 of 1981 relating to the Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority (NARESA) and its duties, functions and powers, of which point 9 (a) reads:

"States to advise the Minister regarding (ii) states policies and measures for the management and development of the natural resources of Sri Lanka in a manner consistent with the national interests". Among the duties of NARESA is to advise the Minister regarding the "measures for the promotion and development of national selfreliance in the application of science and technology for the benefit of the people of Sri Lanka". Under 9 (b), NARESA is expected "to collect and disseminate information on any aspects relating to scientific and technical matters and to provide information and education to the public regarding such matters".

364. NARESA which comes under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Human Resources Development has a steering committee on natural resources which focuses on conservation and regulated use of natural resources. There is also a separate steering committee for the UNESCO sponsored Man and Biosphere programme.

365. To safeguard and prevent harm to the environment there is a statutory body, the Central Environment Authority (CEA), which comes under the Ministry of Transport, Environment and Women's Affairs. This body is empowered to conduct an environment impact assessment (EIA) before any industrial or development project gets government approval. Private laboratories conduct EIAs, but regulations under the Sri Lanka Standards Institution Act are being prepared to make their accreditation mandatory from June 1996.

366. Diffusion of information on scientific progress takes place through sectoral scientific journals, for example, Ceylon Medical Journal, and general scientific journals like the NARESA journal of the National Science Council, and a variety of periodicals, for example, Vidurawa published by NARESA and private publications like Vidusara of the Island Group of newspapers.

367. Measures to prevent the use of scientific and technical progress against the enjoyment of human rights come under the general provisions respecting human rights set out in the Constitution.

368. The protection of moral and material interest resulting from any scientific work is rather weak. There is provision under Patent Laws for protection of these rights disappeared.

Development and diffusion of sciences

369. The Education Ministry is undertaking a study, with World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) funding, to assess the shortcomings in science education at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Once the study is completed, action will be taken to rectify the identified shortcomings.

370. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Human Resources Development has also initiated a study with ADB funding to determine the needs at tertiary levels of science and technology personnel to meet future industrial needs.

371. The Minister of Science, Technology and Human Resources Development is arranging an interministerial meeting with the Minister of Education and Higher Education and relevant staff and experts to identify shortcomings in science and technology education and take suitable corrective action.

372. The newspapers, radio and television carry features and supplements and also have separate programmes and publications to convey to the public basic scientific concepts and new developments that have practical applications. The Government is giving all support to these ventures.

373. There are no legal restrictions that interfere with scientific research. Individuals, scientists and institutions are free to carry out whatever research they wish. In fact, there are no specific restrictions on animal experiments and scientists are not required to get special licences to perform such experiments. There are no restrictions on the exchange of scientific and technical information between scientists and their respective institutions. The practice of ethical review for human experimentation exists, but legal provision is just being formulated.

374. The Ministry of Science, Technology and Human Resources Development gives an annual grant to the Sri Lanka Association for the Advancement of Science. This year it has commenced giving an annual grant to the National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka and also provided it with office accommodation and some equipment. Various professional associations are given small grants when the need arises. The promotion and funding of research is one of the functions of NARESA and it has an annual grants programme. Applications are entertained from institutions and individual scientists. The grants cover cost of supplies, equipment and hire of personnel. The quantum of each grant has been increased almost tenfold in the last year.

375. The major difficulty in the above areas has been the limitation of funds.

International cooperation

376. NARESA has an interministerial contacts fund which is entirely supplied by SAREC of Sweden (now called SIDA). This is used to fund visits of scientists to scientific meetings abroad. Scientists also interact with colleagues abroad through a number of United Nations agencies like WHO. These agencies also provide travel grants and training fellowships, but they are for limited periods and identified subjects.

377. There are opportunities for scientific interaction and visits through regional cooperation, for example in the context of SAARC. There are also opportunities for scientific interaction through bilateral cooperation at governmental and NGO level. Those in State organizations can avail themselves of these opportunities only if they are channelled through the official government mechanisms like the Department of External Resources.