

**Republic of the Marshall Islands**

**National Nuclear Commission**

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**UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment**

**UN Special Rapporteur on Toxics and Human Rights**

**Research thon on Sacrifice Zones and Human Rights**

**Research Period: March 1- August 31, 2021**

**Sacrifice Zones and Human Rights**

**1. Name of submitter**

**RMI National Nuclear Commission (NNC)**

**2. Nation**

**Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)**

**3. Title of the sacrifice zones**

**Bikini Atoll, Enewetak Atoll, Rongelap Atoll and Utrik Island of the Marshall Islands**

**4. Description of the sacrifice zones**

**Between 1946 and 1958, the United States detonated 67 nuclear bombs on, in and above the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), a nation of 29 Atolls in the Pacific Ocean. Some of the most notable operations included Operation Crossroads. The most significant contaminating event was the Castle Bravo, the largest thermonuclear weapon test, conducted on March 1, 1954 in Bikini Atoll. In addition to the populations of Bikini and Enewetak, the people of Rongelap and Utirik were also affected by radioactive fallout from the largest nuclear test the United States has ever conducted. The radioactive deposits in the ocean sediment at the bomb crater led to widespread high levels of fallout contamination over inhabited islands in the Marshall Islands, which remain today.**

**5. Evidence of human rights abuses**

**The radiological legacy of U.S. nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands still resulted in both immediate and continuing effects on the human rights of the Marshallese people. Radiation related cancers and birth defects are a major problem faced by the Marshallese.**

**Cancer is known to be one of the two causes of death in the Marshall Islands aside from diabetes. Environmental issues in particular the degradation attributed to the nuclear testing, has forced residents to be forcibly displaced away from their homes and move between atolls. Radiation levels in some areas of the Republic are almost double, leading to loss of livelihoods and lands. Survivors that witnessed the explosions and their effects are experiencing psychological traumas. Moreover, many Marshallese, especially those from the four nuclear affected Atolls continue to experience indefinite displacement. The impacts of nuclear testing affected every part of the Marshallese society and reaches deeply into the health and livelihoods of communities. With the rising sea levels contamination is now leaking into the ocean threatening to enlarge and spread the contamination beyond the atolls where the tests were conducted.**

**Three years after the detonation of the Castle Bravo, which resulted in the contamination of 15 islands and atolls, the residents on the affected atolls of Rongelap and Utirik were encouraged to return to their homes, so researchers could study the effects of radiation.**

**6. Efforts to clean up or rehabilitate the sacrifice zone**

**In advance of Operation Crossroads in 1946, the US government evacuated Bikini and Enewetak Atolls, claiming to do so for "the good of mankind and to end all wars.” They promised to allow the inhabitants of Bikini and Enewetak to return to their homes one day.**

**In the early 1970’s, after the former residents of Bikini and Enewetak Atolls sued the Government, demanding either compensation for being forced from their homes or to be allowed to return, the U.S. Government began plans to clean up the evacuated islands. This resulted in U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) taking responsibility for conducting a radiological survey of the islands, the Department of Defense (DoD) conducting the cleanup operations, and the Department of Interior (DOI) rehabilitating the land and resettling the people of Bikini and Enewetak. At that time, Bikini was deemed too radioactive to clean and rehabilitate, resulting in Enewetak being the main focus of the cleanup efforts, where the Runit Dome was built as a temporary measure to contain most of the radioactive material left behind from the bomb explosions, some of which were one thousand times more powerful than those that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki of Japan.**

**The cleanup of Enewetak Atoll began in 1977 and ended in 1980. The original estimate for the cleanup was $40 million, but the U.S. Congress only allocated $20 million and stipulated that “all reasonable economies should be realized in the accomplishment of this project through the use of military services’ construction and support forces, their subsistence, equipment, material, supplies, and transportation.**

**Since then, the Government of the Marshall Islands has been in ongoing dialogue with the United States and the international community to draw attention to the lasting degradation, the threat resulting from the leak, and the continued need to rehabilitate and clean up these areas.**

**7. References**

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