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**Chairperson | Republic of the Marshall Islands National Nuclear Commission**

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Enhanced interactive dialogue on the nuclear legacy in the Marshall Islands

*Check against delivery*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Iakwe

I have the honor of joining you this morning not only as the chairperson for the Republic of the Marshall Islands National Nuclear Commission, but also as a descendant of survivors of nuclear weapons testing, and a mother to my three children, to share with you our reality. The Marshall Islands National Nuclear Commission was established in 2017 and its core mandate is to coordinate the government's needs to address the ongoing and unresolved issues of this history and to secure nuclear justice on behalf of the people of the Marshall Islands.

This is a legacy not only of suffering, loss, and frustration- but also of strength, unity, and unwavering commitment to justice.

This profound and painful chapter begins nearly 80 years ago. Despite initial petitions by our people to cease the experiments- during a time where the United Nations was in control of our fate- our pleas were met with silence and resolutions that enabled the destruction to continue.

The immediate effects of the infamous Bravo shot were harrowing. Hours after the exposure on March 1st, many people fell ill. They began to itch and scratch with each scratch peeling their skin off, there was a burning sensation in their eyes, their stomachs were churning in pain, their fingernails changed color, and they developed severe migraines. Mothers watched as their children’s hair fell to the ground and blisters devoured their bodies overnight.

During evacuation and as part of the decontamination process, my family, along with the rest of the community, were stripped of their clothing and stood naked aboard the ship. Humiliated and ravaged by gruesome blistering burns, they were hosed down with a pressure washer on their way to Kwajalein Atoll. Without their consent, they were enrolled as “test subjects” to a top secret medical lab study on the effects of radiation on human beings. Initially,this Study required blood and urine sample collections 3 times a day. It also required bathing in the lagoon and scrubbing their burns with soap in the salt water.

This Study continued for 40 years and involved the extraction of healthy teeth, bone marrow, thyroid glands, and other parts of our bodies and stored them in a laboratory for research purposes. This Study withheld treatment from us to monitor and document the way our bodies respond to exposure.This Study sourced an unexposed control group from nearby atolls - matched by the age and sex of the exposed group.

This Study returned us to our highly contaminated home so the scientists could now study how the body reacts to radiation in the environment traveling through the food chain. This study brought my very own grandparents to New York where they were told by US medical researchers they were being taken for treatment in the best hospitals in the nation, not knowing they were flown in to be showcased as objects of interest at the researchers’ barbecues and picnics. This Study performed autopsies under a breadfruit tree in front of the grieving and traumatized families.

It wasn’t long after the initial exposure when health concerns began to arise, our communities were plagued with various types of cancer, thyroid disease, and our reproductive health was compromised. Women began giving birth to what we call jellyfish babies. The term “jellyfish babies” was coined after the birth of many babies who were born without limbs or a head, whose skin was so transparent their mothers saw their tiny hearts beating within. So deformed, our babies were sometimes born resembling the features of an octopus or the intestines of a turtle, in some instances, a bunch of grapes or a strange looking animal. We were told by those scientists that our babies were a result of incest. Many of which were stored in jars in our old hospital lab, destroyed by fire, along with the hospital records after the Trusteeship ended and the Marshall Islands gained its independence

This legacy has labeled us many names. At one point, scientists were intrigued that we seemed to be more like humans than mice. During oral examinations, American researchers learned several phrases in Marshallese, one of them being “wolañi monke eo” which literally translates to “open your mouth, monkey”. Through it all, when asked, my grandfather, or jimma, would say he felt like a guinea pig.

The Runit Dome, and the plutonium both inside and outside that facility, located in Enewetak Atoll, poses a significant threat to the health and wellbeing of our community. We now face the terrifying reality of raising our families in a poisoned environment.

Honorable members of the Human Rights Council, I come before you to share a deeply personal truth: and my own experience as a caregiver for someone ravaged by cancer. As I watched my loved one endure relentless pain, I grappled with a profound sense of helplessness, the weight of their suffering entwined with my own. In this vulnerable state, I witnessed firsthand how crucial access to comprehensive health care is, which is something we don’t have back home. As we discuss human rights today, let us remember that the dignity of every individual, especially those in their most vulnerable moments, must be fiercely protected and upheld.

In conclusion, I end with these words from an esteemed elder who is no longer with us. Lijon Eknilang worked tirelessly to make sure others never have to experience the horrors of nuclear weapons:

“They can take me as I am, take my body to use it anywhere, but not my children. The future. That’s what I need, to know they won’t be used as guinea pigs. They could take my body and tear it apart and share it with all the world to study with, but not my children.”