

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

Expert Input: Nuclear Legacy in RMI

This input focuses on the aftermath of the 21st of January 1968 B52 crash near Thule Air Base in Greenland.

As a journalist I've worked on the Thule case for more than 22 years. Most likely I'm the person in Denmark with the deepest knowledge of the different perspectives of the case.

OHCHR representative Mr. Raphael Pangalangan has encouraged me to highlight key mechanisms and practices from the Thule context that could be applied or are relevant to the situation in the Marshall Islands.

In an e-mail 23rd of February 2024 Mr. Raphael Pangalangan specified the following five issues:

1. **Truth Mechanisms:** This includes official investigations, radiological assessments, transparency, and the participation of affected communities.
2. **Accountability Mechanisms:** Procedures that establish state responsibility or individual liability for the nuclear exposure.
3. **Reparations:** Compensation programs and other reparative measures, such as recognition and apology to affected communities.
4. **Guarantees of Non-Repetition:** Institutional changes made to ensure that the initial nuclear exposure and its impacts are avoided and mitigated moving forward.
5. **Memorialization:** Measures adopted to preserve the memory and honor victims, which can include physical structures (memorials) or through education and memorial holidays.

Ad 1. Truth Mechanisms:

Since 1968, there have been some series of Danish so-called statistical register studies of the involved 1.200 Danish workers who helped US Air Force in the clean-up "Project Crested Ice" after the nuclear accident, which ended on 17th of September 1968.

The involved Danish Thule workers were never told that they were cleaning up after a nuclear accident. Individual measurements of radiation have never been made on the workers by when most of them returned to Denmark after the stay at Thule Air Base. Only statistical register studies have been performed. During the clean-up, the Danes' exposure to ionizing radioactive radiation was measured by US military personnel when they had worked out on the crash site of the B52 – otherwise without protection unlike the American personnel – at the so-called Tank Farm. The contents of these list have been kept secret. When drivers had been out at the crash site, they were given new clothes at every return to the base due to radiation, provided by the US Air Force. But this happened without recording the individual worker's radiation level. After the stay at Thule Air Base, no Danish workers have received individual measurements of their respective exposure by doctors specialized in ionizing radiation or other specialized health personnel. There has thus been no hint of openness from the Danish authorities regarding the individual worker's health information, which has been repeatedly pointed out by the Thule workers. The EU Parliament has also demanded that Denmark start monitoring the Thule workers, according to the EURATOM directive. It happened by an almost unanimous decision in EU Parliament on 10th of May 2007. Denmark has since refused to comply with the decision. Along the way, there has been absolutely no involvement whatsoever of the Inuit population around Thule Air Base.

Ad 2 Accountability Mechanisms:

No one, neither the authorities nor the then employer Danish Construction Corporation, DCC, has taken any responsibility for the Thule workers. Denmark has never assumed responsibility for any radiation damage that the 1.200 Thule workers may have sustained. Back in 1968, the Danish workers were employed by the Danish-American company DCC, of which E. Pihl & Son was a co-owner. As recently as 2023, lawyer Ian Anderson raised claims for the Thule workers against E. Phil and Son via the US Supreme Court. The Supreme Court dismissed the case.

Ad 3 Reparations:

The Danish government paid out – after the so-called "Thule hearing" in Copenhagen, October 1995 – to everyone who had passed through the area of Thule Air Base from 21st January – 17th September 1968, a culance-wise compensation of DKK 50,000. The Thule workers called the allowance a team candy to make them shut up.

Danish authorities and the then employer DCC have never given any apology to the Thule workers. It was therefore a very conscious thoughtfully accurate choice that the amount of DKK 50,000 was paid out as a "reimbursement in terms of compensation."

In this way, Denmark and the then Danish government avoided taking on legal responsibility.

The Thule case has been closed since 1995 (see page 2, 3rd paragraph in "Letter January 14th2005 EU ambassador to Committee of Petition" attached this input), both politically in the Danish parliament Folketinget, among all political parties and among all relevant authorities.

The Thule workers have only been met with closed doors in their countless attempts to obtain information about their state of health.

Ad 4 Guarantees of Non-Repetition:

Denmark has done nothing at all to prevent a possible repetition of the nuclear accident on February 21st, 1968. The US Air Force has basically unlimited power at Thule Air Base, and Denmark has never admitted that there have been nuclear weapons at the base, even though all Danish territory including Greenland is and has always been declared a nuclear-weapon-free.

Ad 5 Memorialization:

There never has been and are not today any memorials or days of remembrance for the nuclear accident 21st of January 1968 nor for the efforts of the Thule workers. The Thule workers have never been given an excuse for working for half a year without protective equipment against ionizing radiation from plutonium PU239 and many other radioactive substances. A former Danish foreign minister, Niels Helveg Pedersen admitted to me some years ago that "We have not treated the Thule workers well enough."

It is probably the closest the Thule workers will ever get to an apology from Denmark.

The above comments can of course all be documented if desired by the OHCHR.

I allow myself to add some English-language documents of the case to this input.

I am of course available to OHCHR if the organization wants additional information presented.

With best regards

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