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LIVINGSTON COLLEGE - GRADUATE PROGRAM IN ANTHROPOLOGY  
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June 24, 1980

Mr. Cliff Sloan  
Office of Rep. Sidney R. Yates  
2234 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

403129

Dear Cliff:

I am writing this letter as a follow-up to our meeting of April 14th, and also to bring you up to date on some points concerning the Marshall Islands and the Enewetak resettlement. By now I am certain of your growing bewilderment in these matters due to the many, and often contradictory, reports your Office receives relating to the Marshalls. I must say that you have my sympathies in attempting to untangle this "nuclear quagmire," and hope this correspondence will be of some help in your attempt to understand the myriad complexities in the Marshall Islands.

I should like to say at the outset that I have always favored prudence and caution when dealing with problems associated with radiation in the Marshalls, and the entire history of the United States' testing program bespeaks the need for very careful analysis and consideration of all relevant factors affecting the well-being of the Marshallese. A case in point is the current dilemma facing the Enewetak Islanders, and particularly the people of Enjebi, who are understandably anxious to return to their ancestral island after living in exile for thirty-three years.

It is my sincere feeling that the people of Enjebi should be allowed to return to their home island, but only on the condition that it is "safe" for them to return. I use quotations around the word "safe" because the whole question of Enjebi revolves around the meaning and interpretation of what constitutes "safe." As you are well-aware, this notion of what constitutes a "safe" level of radiation is one of the most hotly-debated issues in the nuclear field, and it is nearly impossible to find two reputable radiation experts who will agree about a "safe" level of radiation.

In the following paragraphs, I would like to briefly outline some major points which I think are relevant to the Enjebi question, and I would like to reiterate my earlier request for truly independent radiation experts in the Marshall Islands in order to prevent further conflicts of interest regarding the interpretation of radiological data in the Marshalls. If independent radiation experts prolong the Enjebi resettlement for an additional six months or so, then so be it! Six more months is a short time in relation to the thirty-three years

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already spent in exile by the Enjebi people. It is my belief that prudence and caution must take precedence over expedient and often-catastrophic political considerations. In the case of the Enjebi resettlement, if history should prove that we were too cautious and that we acted too prudently, I assure you that it would be a first in the Marshall Islands. I know that I personally would rather be in the position--say ten or twenty years hence--of having to explain why there was a six-month delay in the Enjebi return, rather than have to explain why one more previously "unexposed" group of Marshallese became an "exposed" group because of a hasty decision made by some "concerned" people who thought that things were "alright" on Enjebi.

I think the following points will substantiate my present concern over the Enjebi resettlement and my request for truly independent radiation experts in the Marshall Islands. We can only stand to gain from having an alternate point of view in relation to the radiological data and the recommendations therein, and I am convinced that the Enjebi people can only benefit from our acting with caution and prudence:

1) The entire history of the "nuclear age" has been beset with the constant downward revision of what constitutes a "safe" level of radiation for humans. It was previously believed that a dose of 50 rem was "safe" for humans; the dose was then decreased by a factor of ten to 5 rem; and the current BEIR (Biological Effects of Ionizing Radiation) Committee of the National Academy of Sciences--which was itself divided over the question of "safe" radiation levels, and whose recommendations are far from being universally accepted by well-respected radiation experts--recommends a dose of 0.5 rem in its 1979 updated Report. What this adds up to is a history of continuing uncertainty concerning the assessment of "safe" levels of radiation for humans, and this ongoing debate is exemplified by Drs. Gofman and Rall in the enclosed symposium transcript of the recent American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) symposium I was asked to chair.

2) Dr. Robert A. Conard, who was the former head of the Brookhaven National Laboratory-Marshall Islands Program, expressed great surprise over the late-occurring thyroid effects in the exposed Marshallese populations. He claimed that these late effects were not anticipated before 1963, and it is fair to say that we still do not know what is going to happen in the future in this population. Again, this is a

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major finding in the Brookhaven studies, and it points up the continuing uncertainties relating to the long-term effects of radiation, and the need for extreme caution and prudence when making policy decisions affecting the future health and safety of the Enjebi people.

3) The decision to allow the Bikini people to resettle on their ancestral atoll, and then the decision to quickly remove them in light of the potential threat to their health stemming from the internal deposition of radionuclides in the form of "residual" radiation at Bikini surely must not be forgotten when considering the proposed Enjebi resettlement. I have enclosed a 1975 radiation study from Lawrence Livermore Laboratory which should be compared with the current Bender-Brill study of Enewetak. It is uncanny to compare the reassuring language in both studies, and the "musical chairs" fiasco of the unfortunate Bikini Islanders--who were previously "unexposed" and who are now "exposed"--should remind us of the continuing enigmas surrounding the nuclear debate, especially as it pertains to "safe" levels of radiation for humans.

4) In retrospect, it seems clear why Japanese radiation scientists--who were invited out to the Marshalls by Marshallese and their elected representatives--were not allowed to visit the irradiated atolls of Rongelap and Utirik. The history of mistakes and mismanagement in radiation matters in the Marshalls exhibits the flaws associated with decisions being made from the recommendations of a point of view which has consistently been at odds with reality. What has sorely been needed (and wanted) in the Marshalls is an alternate point of view concerning the radiological data, and we now have the opportunity to correct our past mistakes by allowing truly independent radiation experts to assess Enewetak and Enjebi, as well as the rest of the Northern Marshalls which were affected by nuclear testing.

5) In my 1979 address to the United Nations Trusteeship Council, I requested independent and non-governmental radiation experts for an assessment of the Marshall Islands. The Trusteeship Council agreed with my request in its "Report of the Trusteeship Council to the Security Council" (in the Security Council's Official Records, Thirty-Fourth Year, Special Supplement No. 1, 9 June 1978 - 15 June 1979). To my knowledge, there has been no such survey by independent radiation experts in the Marshalls, and the time is right for such a survey. (Please see the enclosed U.N. documents)

In closing, I would like to mention that I have received a copy of a letter written by Mr. Theodore Mitchell (of Micronesian Legal Services), who represents the Enewetak people. I feel obliged to

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respond to this letter, which was taken out of context from a telephone conversation I had with Mr. Mitchell in May, and which certainly calls into question my expertise as a Marshalls expert, as well as my motives for having a continued interest in the affairs of the Marshallese.

In our conversation, Mr. Mitchell repeatedly asked me about the "competence" of Drs. Bender and Brill in reference to their study entitled "Assessment of Radiation Health Effects of the Resettlement of Enewetak Atoll." I repeatedly explained to Mr. Mitchell that there was more than "competence" at stake in the study, and that I did not necessarily question the "competence" of the two scientists, but rather the inherent "conflict of interest" in having Brookhaven researchers assess United States Government data. I carefully explained to Mr. Mitchell that the history of the United States' testing program was one of repeated mistakes and miscalculations, and the very least we could now do was to show our sincerity to the Marshallese by including non-Government radiation experts in radiological surveys.

When Mr. Mitchell asked me if I had the background to assess the Bender-Brill study, I said "Not exactly, because my emphasis in the Marshall Islands has been in the sociocultural domain as it pertains to my ongoing Ph.D. dissertation work." I also said that I did have "enough of a background in basic radiological studies to know that an independent survey was sorely needed in the Marshalls," but he purposely neglected to mention that part of our conversation in his letter to your Office. Moreover, I might mention that Mr. Mitchell, who seems to feel that he is some sort of radiation expert, should probably learn that the very first rule in making radiation assessments is that the long-term effects of radiation, and especially low-level radiation (like the kind the Enjebi Islanders will be exposed to when and if they return to their island) are still a major source of contention amongst reputable radiation experts: Drs. Bender and Brill, as competent as they may be, are making mere speculations about the long-term effects of radiation at Enewetak. We may not know for ten or twenty or thirty more years what the long-term effects of low-level radiation are, and to date there has been no "Nuclear Moses" who has brought these answers down from Mt. Sinai on stone tablets. At the very least, our experience in the Marshalls proves that we should proceed with extreme caution, and if we are to error, let us do something different for a change and error on the side of health and safety of the unfortunate Marshallese. We have been playing nuclear "roulette" with innocent lives for too long.

And it is interesting to note that the recent article in the "Micronesian Independent" about Enewetak seems to suggest that Mr.

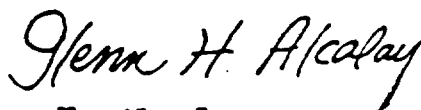
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Mitchell was behind the letter to President Carter which in fact was a very different letter than the one signed by the three chiefs from Enewetak. It was my experience while a Peace Corps volunteer on Utirik that Marshallese never use the sort of language contained in the translated letter sent to the President, and I can only surmise that the original letter was grossly distorted, and misrepresented the views and feelings of the signatories of the letter. It is very interesting to compare this incident with the letter Mr. Mitchell wrote to your Office about our telephone conversation, which grossly distorted my views about the Marshall Islands.

Cliff, you should be aware that Giff Johnson (of Micronesia Support Committee) and I have submitted the Bender-Brill study to several well-respected radiation experts for their scrutiny and comments. We shall send their analyses and comments along to your office as soon as we get them, as it is imperative that we have an alternate point of view for the Bender-Brill study: we are dealing with the health and safety of human beings who have a history of "losing" with the United States Government, and we can presently help to rectify some of our mistakes if we proceed with caution.

Thank you for taking the time to consider these thoughts and views about the Marshall Islanders.

Sincerely,



Glenn H. Alcalay

Enclosures

xc: Ted Mitchell  
Giff Johnson, MSC  
Arthur Paterson, National Council of Churches  
Anton DeBrum, Marshall Islands Government  
Ruth G. Van Cleve, DOTA-Interior  
Peter R. Rosenblatt