

November 25, 1967

Senar Clifford Case
United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Case;

My husband and I are serving in the Peace Corps in the Marshall Islands district of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. I suspect that you receive many letters from Volunteers whose new perspective has heightened their awareness of a problem in which the United States is involved. This has been the case in our situation. The island where we are located has its special problems which have involved us deeply.

The name Bikini is familiar to most Americans today, I believe. This was an atoll in the Marshall Islands used for atomic testing. How many Americans are familiar with the fact that there were people living on this atoll before the bomb tests? I don't believe there are too many, and I myself belonged to that majority who did not until a very short time ago. Those people were moved, of course, before the tests. After several unsuccessful moves, they were finally moved to the island of Killi. This is their home today. It is also my home for two years.

To understand the problems, one needs some background about the Marshallese people. Briefly, they are people who value their land highly, especially since there is none to spare among these tiny islands. Also their welfare is highly dependent on the sea and the food available from the sea. The Marshall Islands, as you may know, is comprised mostly of atolls, not single islands. These atolls are strings of islands on a foundation of coral rock generally forming an oval encircling a body of water called a lagoon. This lagoon is the "bread basket" of those people living on the atoll. Lagoon waters are generally calm, protected from the rough water of the open ocean. Also they are generally well stocked with fish, turtles, lobster, clams, a plentiful food supply. Bikini was such an atoll. One other important

1940

feature of an atoll is that there is usually a pass or break between some of the islands, thus providing access to an excellent protected harbor.

The import of this information becomes clear when I tell you that Killi, the present home of these people, is an island, a single island, not part of an atoll, and not linked to any other island in any way. Thus, all those advantages of atoll life are missing. The land area, small enough on an atoll, is much less. There is no protected fishing area, but only open ocean and surf pounding against a coral rock shore. Even when the surf is not too rough and the men are able to get their fragile canoes past the breakers and into the open sea, the results are often disappointing or disastrous. I saw a canoe broken by the surf one day when a storm came up suddenly. No turtles, lobster, or clams are available here. Thus these people are reduced to a slim diet of fish, rather than the rich seafood diet they previously enjoyed.

The second major aspect of the problem concerns the ability of these people to receive goods. The lack of a lagoon means the lack of the protected harbor which enables most Marshallese to unload their goods from the field trip ship with comparatively little difficulty. Again the Killi people are at a disadvantage. They must unload their goods on the open sea and negotiate them to shore through the breakers. In general, the ships' captains are reluctant even to stop at Killi because of the danger to their small boats and outboard motors used for unloading goods. My husband and I lost at least \$15 worth of our supplies because the boats were swamped several times on the day we arrived.

I am not exaggerating when I say that these people have lived unhappy lives for twenty years, longing for the day when they might return to Bikini. Their lives have even been temporary in the sense that they felt no urgency to improve their homes or to maintain their school and other buildings. There has always been the feeling that the very next day they might get word that they could return to Bikini. A lack of a real sense of the future and a parallel lack of real understanding of the intentions of the United States in regard to their home atoll have increased their confusion as this state of affairs has not been resolved.

1941

Within the past year Bikini atoll has been declared fit for human habitation by the Atomic Energy Commission. No decision, however, has been reached as to whether these people may return to Bikini. Even more than before, they are restless to return.

I realize that I am very close to this problem and perhaps am not as objective as I would otherwise be. I am close enough to see one side very clearly. In my eyes they have been treated unfairly, although I do not overlook the fact that they did receive financial reimbursement for the use of their land. The psychological upset and the physical hardships involved have caused them to pay a high price.

I urge you to look into this problem from your vantage point. I urge you to consider carefully the welfare of these people. I urge you to do what you can to resolve this problem and return these people to their land.

Sincerely yours,

Hope E. Jenkins
(Mrs.) Hope E. Jenkins

1942