

REPOSITORY NARA - College Park
COLLECTION RG 306 Office of Secretary
1951-58 Correspondence
BOX No. 186
FOLDER MR 9 A 7-1, Vol. III

307

APR 15 1957 408749

Memorandum for Those Listed Below

Subject: Proposed Interior Department Announcement on Return of Rongelapese

R

AEC 125/30, approved by the Commission on February 21, 1957, included as Appendix "E" a draft announcement to be proposed to the Department of Interior for issuance when the Department determines that the Rongelap inhabitants can return to their home atoll.

The Department of Interior later provided us with a revision of this draft, which has been edited by the Divisions of Information Services, Military Application and Biology and Medicine. It is similar to the draft proposed to Interior, although less detailed. A copy is attached for your information.

We are advised that a letter has been sent from the Commission to the Joint Committee, stating that the Commission has determined that the Rongelap people may be safely returned. Since the announcement will be made by the Department of Interior, which has responsibility for the actual decision as to the natives' return, we do not believe that further notice to the Committee is necessary. Mr. LaPlante's office concurs in this judgment.

After receiving Commission comment on this draft, we will return it to the Department of Interior, with a notation that it would be wise to consult the State Department for advice on timing of issuance in relation to possible international impact.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Morse Salisbury, Director
Division of Information Services

Attachment

Addressees:

Lewis L. Strauss, Chairman (via E. Holles) cc: Secretariat
Thomas E. Murray, Commissioner General Counsel
Willard F. Libby, Commissioner Gen. Starbird, DMA
Harold S. Vance, Commissioner Dr. Dunham, B&M
K. E. Fields, General Manager (via B. F. LaPlante, GMSA
H. S. Traynor, AGM)

4-15-57

ROMOELAP PEOPLE TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES IN THE TRUST TERRITORY
OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

Plans are being made for the return of the Rongelap people who were exposed to fallout during the nuclear experiments at the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's Eniwetok Proving Grounds in March, 1954, to their home atoll in the Marshall Islands in about five months, the Department of the Interior announced today.

The plans are being made as a result of information from the Atomic Energy Commission that the people may safely be returned to Rongelap. The Commission has advised the Department that it has carefully evaluated data from several radiological surveys made during the past two and one-half years. The results of the latest survey indicate the presence of residual radioactivity at a level that is acceptable from a health point of view, both as regards the potential external gamma radiation exposure and Strontium-90 in the food supply, with the possible exception of land crabs. The Rongelap inhabitants will be advised not to eat land crabs, pending the results of future radiological surveys. Land crabs are not a major item in their normal diet.

Eighty-two Rongelap inhabitants were removed from their home atoll following the fallout that occurred after the March 1, 1954 nuclear test at the Eniwetok Proving Grounds. They remained on Kwajalein until June, 1954, when they were moved to a village constructed for them on Ejit Island in the Majuro Atoll.

A number of Rongelap inhabitants who were away from the atoll at the time of the fallout also have been living on Ejit or elsewhere in the Marshall Islands. The size of the group also has been increased

(more)

by marriages with non-residents of Rongelap and by births, and about 200 persons will be returned to the island.

The superficial radiation skin burns received by some of the people as a result of their exposure were healed by the fall of 1954. There has been a regrowth of hair, normal in color, texture and amount, in the individuals who experienced loss of hair following the fallout. The people have received periodic medical examinations from Atomic Energy Commission specialists and Trust Territory physicians. Medical examinations will be continued in the future.

Plans for the rehabilitation of Rongelap include the construction of new homes and community buildings, replacement of village access paths, increased water storage facilities, and installation of a two-way radio communications facility.