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Forty-sixth Session

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE FOURTEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-SIXTH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 22 May 1979, at 10.30 a.m.

President: Miss HARDEN (United Kingdom)

Examination of the annual report of the Administering Authority for the year ended 30 September 1978: Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (continued)

Examination of petitions listed in the annex to the agenda

Organization of work

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79-70317

Mr. ALCALAY: I am honoured to be able to appear today before the United Nations Trusteeship Council in order to convey some thoughts and sentiments concerning human rights from the people of Utirik Atoll in the Marshall Islands. I am a former Peace Corps volunteer who spent two years (1975-1977) working as a Co-operative Adviser and elementary school teacher on Utirik Atoll, and at present I am a graduate student in anthropology at Rutgers University doing research concerning the radiological effects on Marshallese society and culture.

I am here today to discuss the violation of the human rights of the Marshall Islanders who were exposed to radio-active fallout during the United States' atomic testing programme in the Pacific. It seems quite paradoxical to consider their situation, which has resulted in a number of radiation-related diseases in the exposed Marshallese populations when contrasted with the protections of article 6 of the Trusteeship Agreement, which requires the United States to:

"Promote the social advancement of the inhabitants, and to this end ... protect the rights and fundamental freedoms of all elements of the population without discrimination; protect the health of the inhabitants ..."

In order for the international community effectively to respond to this problem, there is need for an international survey to be conducted in the Marshall Islands.

I am also here to reiterate a request made by Representative Ataji Balos, a member of the Congress of Micronesia from the Marshall Islands. On 26 January 1972, during the second regular session of the Fourth Congress of Micronesia, in Palau District, Congressman Balos requested that the World Health Organization be called upon to conduct a survey of the irradiated Marshall Islanders. To my knowledge, no such survey has yet been conducted, and it would be appropriate for the Trusteeship Council to initiate such a survey under the auspices of the World Health Organization, with the possible collaboration of Japanese doctors and scientists from Hiroshima University School of Medicine and the National Institute of Radiological Sciences of Japan.

(Mr. Alcalay)

As you know, Utirik Atoll was one of the inhabited atolls which received radio-active fall-out from the 1 March 1954 detonation of "Bravo", the second hydrogen test, at Bikini Island. Following the incident, the inhabitants of Rongelap and Utirik were evacuated from their home islands and were taken to Kwajalein Atoll, a United States missile testing site. There the irradiated Marshallese experienced the primary symptoms of radiation sickness: itching and burning of the skin, eyes and mouth; nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea. After two weeks, the Marshallese manifested the secondary effects of radiation sickness: the appearance of "beta" skin burns, epilation - the hair of the head falling out; and decreased blood cell counts. After the third month on Kwajalein, the people from Utirik were returned to their home atoll, and a team of scientists from Brookhaven National Laboratory initiated a medical programme to monitor the effects of the radiation in the exposed Marshallese population.

(Mr. Alcalay)

In 1963, nine years after the fall-out, the first long-term effect from the radiation manifested itself in the form of a tumour in the thyroid gland of a Marshallese who had been exposed to fall-out. In the years following, several more thyroid tumours appeared and at present the prognosis, in the words of Dr. Robert A Conard, who formerly supervised the Brookhaven surveys, seems rather uncertain:

"Recently, about 50 per cent of the exposed Rongelap people showed biochemical hypothyroidism without clinical evidence of thyroid disease, a finding that probably portends trouble ahead."

In 1969 the Atomic Energy Commission declared Bikini Island safe for habitation, and 100 of the ex-Bikini people, who had been living on Kili Island since their forced migration in 1946, were allowed to resettle on their home island of Bikini. Then, in 1978 the people of Bikini were once again forced to evacuate their home atoll when it was discovered that radiation levels exceeded the preliminary allowable levels considered safe for humans. In retrospect, it now appears that the "musical chairs" life-style of the Bikini Islanders is the result of policies which have been formulated from very subjective interpretations of the radiological information, and it highlights the need for an alternative point of view. Such an alternative point of view will be provided if the Trusteeship Council acts in requesting an independent radiological survey to be undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO) and others.

While I was a Peace Corps volunteer on Utiirik Atoll, the village Council repeatedly asked me to help them to obtain better and more compassionate medical treatment of troubles stemming from their irradiation. One such request was in the form of a Council letter written on 9 July 1976 to the Nevada Operations Office of the Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) - now the Department of Energy. This letter, a copy of which was sent to the Secretary of the Trusteeship Council, articulated some of the major complaints of the Utiirik people with the Brookhaven National Laboratory radiological and medical surveys. A sense of frustration and confusion may be readily inferred from the contents of the letter, and the people could not understand why the United Nations did not respond to their request for assistance.

(r. Alcalay)

Another question persistently asked by the Utirik people related to the fact that several Japanese doctors who were invited to the Marshall Islands by Representative Ataji Balos were never allowed entry visas into the Marshall Islands District. Representative Balos, in 1971, invited a Japanese medical team to study the exposed Marshallese because "the people of Rongelap and Utirik had become suspicious that the Atomic Energy Commission sponsored team was not treating them properly." "Why", ask the Marshallese on Utirik, "were the Japanese not allowed to come out to our islands?"

It has now been 25 years since the "Bravo" hydrogen explosion caused the human rights of the irradiated Marshallese to be violated for an indeterminate time - perhaps for generations to come. The following recommendations are made to the Trusteeship Council in the hope that the Council will continue to fulfil its obligation to oversee the administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands by the United States:

First, the Trusteeship Council should request an independent epidemiological/radiobiological survey through the World Health Organization (WHO), with the possible collaboration of Japanese doctors and scientists having expertise in radiation science and medicine.

Secondly, a survey should be conducted of the local environments and ecologies of the affected atolls, including a study of the flora, fauna and marine biota.

Thirdly, a bilingual manual - in both English and Marshallese - should be created and published containing the results from the epidemiological and radiological surveys conducted by the World Health Organization. Such a manual would contribute greatly towards the exposed Marshall Islanders' understanding of the radiation and its effects.

As an addendum, I should like to read out part of an article which is quite relevant to my statement. It appeared in The New York Times of Saturday, 19 May 1979. The title of the article is: "U.N. Agency Accused of Hiding Data on Hazards in Nuclear Energy" and its date line is "Nairobi, Kenya, May 18".

(Mr. Alcalay)

"An environmental 'watchdog' organization has accused the United Nations Environment Programme of suppressing its own report on possible health hazards in nuclear energy and the dangers of accident at nuclear-power installations.

"The Environment Liaison Centre, which has headquarters here and represents the interests of a wide range of non-governmental groups concerned about the environment, said that the report was not released in April as scheduled because of pressures from a nuclear-power lobby led by the International Atomic Energy Agency, a United Nations entity."

I would certainly hope that the proposed survey to conduct epidemiological studies in the Marshalls would not be made this Agency.

The PRESIDENT: I should like to mention for the record that the copy of Mr. Alcalay's statement that is being distributed has documents appended.

The next speaker is Father William Wood, on whom I now call.

Father WOOD: A coalition of American religious and academic organizations and individuals appears today to submit this communication to the United Nations Trusteeship Council.

The coalition examines the relationships between the United States and Micronesia so that it may help the United States to fulfil its Trusteeship obligation. Our initial assessment of the United States record leads us to the conviction that this obligation has not been fulfilled.

The coalition was formed in response to issues of justice and human rights to which our attention directed by the Pacific Conference of Churches, an organization of Catholic and Protestant Churches in the Pacific. This Pacific Conference is convinced that the United States has, by promoting its own special interests, impeded the processes through which the peoples of the Trust Territory might fully realize their right to self-determination and human fulfilment.

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REPORT OF THE TRUSTEESHIP COUNCIL TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL
ON THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS
9 June 1978 - 15 June 1979

SECURITY COUNCIL OFFICIAL RECORDS

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654. The Council is also pleased to learn that a new school has been completed and a new dispensary provided and that the church built for the original inhabitants of Kili Island has been expanded. It further notes with satisfaction that 10 houses have been built on Ijit Island in Majuro atoll for a small group of Bikinians who chose not to return to Kili after the second evacuation from Bikini in 1978.

655. The Council notes with satisfaction that a clean-up of Enewetak is proceeding according to schedule and should be completed in 1980. It further notes that some tests are currently being undertaken to assess the contamination present in the northern islands of the atoll and that, should the levels of radiation prove satisfactory for habitation, the resettlement programme will be modified to allow for the resettlement of families on Enjebi, but in either case the resettlement will be completed on schedule.

656. The Council urges the Administering Authority to take all necessary precautions to ensure that the inhabitants of the Marshall Islands are not further exposed to radiation hazards. It notes that during the current session the Special Adviser from the Marshall Islands, the petitioners representing the International League for Human Rights and the people of Bikini expressed their desire to have independent experts survey the health hazards resulting from weapons-testing in the Marshall Islands. In view of the fears aroused in the Trust Territory as a result of the recent discovery that Bikini is not after all safe for resettlement, the Council suggests to the Administering Authority that it might consider the association of such an expert in any future survey, in order to reassure the population. The Council notes with satisfaction the statement by the Administering Authority that it considers the health of the displaced population to be a matter of primary concern. The Council also notes with satisfaction that compensation and continuing medical care are being provided for the inhabitants of Bikini, Rongelap and Utirik atolls who were exposed to radiation.

657. The Council notes with concern the continuing influx of population into the island of Ebeye, where over 8,000 inhabitants now live in shanty-town conditions on a surface area of 30 hectares. Since this situation poses acute social problems, the Council hopes that the Administering Authority and the new Government of the Marshall Islands will urgently consider solutions on both a short-term and long-term basis. The Council notes with interest that, according to the Special Adviser from the Marshall Islands, plans are under discussion: (a) to encourage those who have emigrated to Ebeye to return to their atolls of origin where efforts would be made to improve their living conditions; and (b) to develop other islands of Kwajalein atoll where another section of the population of Ebeye would be established while continuing to be employed at the Kwajalein base. The Council commends these projects which seem promising and hopes that the resources required for their implementation can be found.

War and post-war damage claims

658. The Trusteeship Council reiterates its concern that war damage claims have not yet been settled as determined by the Micronesian Claims Commission. The Council notes with satisfaction, however, that the United States Congress has authorized full payment of claims under Title II and that payment of all outstanding claims under Title II, amounting to \$US 12.6 million, is now virtually completed.