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REPLY VIA AIR MAIL TO Marshalls Office

May 4, 1973

Action Office T.A.
For info only S

Honorable Richard M. Nixon
President
United States of America
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear President Nixon:

This letter is written on behalf of the displaced people of Bikini Atoll, now residing on Kili Island, United States Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. It is a detailed discussion of the past trials, fears, and sufferings of the Bikini people, written with intention of placing the grievances of the Bikini people before the United States. This letter is most emphatically a petition for redress of the sufferings and exploitation of the Bikini people by the United States during the last 27 years.

The suffering of the Bikini people began, as far as the United States is concerned and responsible -- on January 24, 1946. On that date the Pentagon announced that the United States had selected Bikini Atoll in the Northern Marshall Islands as the site of a series of atomic tests. Part of the requirements of the test program were that the test site be quite distant from all heavily populated areas, 500 miles from all air and sea routes, and uninhabited or containing only a few people who could be relocated. The "few people" in this case were the people of Bikini. They may have been "few" from the United States point of view, but from the Bikinians own point of view, they were all the people, not just a few. The decision of the Joint Chief of Staff made no provision for the feelings, aspirations, or wishes of the "few", it was simply unthinkable that so few could or would defy the wishes of so many.

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Thus on February 10, 1946, the Military Governor of the Marshall Islands came to Bikini in an amphibious airplane to tell the Bikinians about the decisions made in Washington, 5,000 miles away. The Governor explained that the United States had a new and powerful weapon to be tested, and that it would be tested at Bikini.

The people of Bikini, understanding little, and, faced by awesome power of the United States, and having no other recourse, relented. Their iroiij (chief) Juda told the Governor that the United States could use Bikini if it would result in kindness and benefit to all mankind.

The difficult problem of what to do with the "few" was left unanswered for the time being. By February 23 the United States had decided to move the Bikini people to Rongerik Atoll, an uninhabited atoll also in the Northern Marshall Islands. Time proved the choice to be extremely unfortunate.

Rongerik Atoll lies about 100 miles to the East of Bikini Atoll. In all measurements, it is a great deal smaller than Bikini. Bikini has 23 islands on the atoll; Rongerik, 10; the total land area of Bikini is 2.32 sq. miles; Rongerik consists of only .63 sq. miles. Bikini's lagoon consists of 243 sq. miles while Rongerik's lagoon is only 55 sq. miles. Events soon made evident that fact that the Pentagon never considered whether an atoll with one-fourth the lagoon size of Bikini and one-third the land area of Bikini could support 200 Bikini people.

On March 7 and 8, 1946 -- less than a month after being told that they were to be moved, -- the Navy moved all 199 Bikini people to Rongerik atoll. The trouble began. The Bikinians had long considered Rongerik to be associated with Libokra, an evil female spirit who dealt in poisons. Many of the fish on Rongerik were in fact poison, and many people became sick from eating them. Furthermore, the food resources of Rongerik were not sufficient to support the Bikinians. A report by a medical officer in July, 1947 reported that the people were suffering from malnutrition. A disastrous fire had destroyed 30% of the food trees a month earlier. The United States investigated the situation, and discussions were had about moving the people elsewhere. Nevertheless, nothing was done. Finally, in November, 1947, the United States and the Bikini people decided that the atoll of Ujelang would be a better place for them. With the help of ten Bikini men, construction was begun on a village at Ujelang. On December 2, the United States decreed that the Enewetak atoll was also to be used for atomic testing, and that the inhabitants of that atoll would also have to relocate. The Enewetak people would be moved to Ujelang. Not for the first time, and certainly not for the last, the Bikini people had the rug pulled from under them. They remained on Rongerik.

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In early 1948 a United States anthropologist visited Rongerik. He reported that the people had been cutting down and eating the heart of young palm trees, because there was nothing else to eat. By early 1948, most of the edible young trees had been eaten. Fishing efforts were reduced because Rongerik's coconuts were of such poor quality that they could not produce the sennit needed to lash the homemade canoes together and to serve as rigging. On January 31, 1948, the only food on the island was one bag of flour, which was mixed with a little water and doled out to 167 people. All ripe pandanus and coconut fruits had long since been eaten. In the next few days some unripe coconuts were eaten, along with the only fish that could be procured, a small, slightly poisonous butterfly fish. In response to emergency messages, a doctor and emergency supplies were flown to Rongerik in February, 1948. The doctor examined the people and pronounced their condition to be that of a starving people.

In March, 1948, the United States government confronted the situation and moved the people of Bikini again. Their stay on Rongerik had lasted almost two years to the day. This time the people were moved to Kwajalein atoll, several hundred miles to the south. Kwajalein had been a major Japanese military installation, and the Americans were in the process of transforming it into a Navy base. Many Marshallese workers had been recruited to work at the base on its construction. These workers were housed separately, across the long airfield in a Marshallese labor camp. The military put up 30 ten by ten tents for the Bikini people in the same general area, and the Bikini people thereafter received their meals in a large messhall with the other Marshallese workers. No subsistence or handicraft activities were possible on Kwajalein. There was nothing to do but watch the goings-on at the base and observe the workings of telephones, movie theaters, refrigeration units, streets, and assorted indicia of military technology. The anthropologists tell us that the social fabric of the Bikini people has not been the same since their sojourn at Kwajalein.

The stay at Kwajalein was never intended to be permanent. The people would stay only long enough to decide where to move them next. The military narrowed the choices to Wotho atoll or Kili island. After a very short visit to both sites by a few members of the Bikini community, the people decided that they should move to Kili Island. They were moved to Kili Island -- their Kili prison, as they later called it -- in November of 1948.

Kili is an island in the southern Marshall Islands, 400 miles south of Bikini. In contrast to Bikini, it has a good deal of rain. Water is perhaps its only plentiful resource. It is very small, comprising just less than 200 acres in size or .31 sq. miles, or about one-seventh of the area of Bikini. Kili is an island, not

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an atoll, and is fringed with a reef. There is no lagoon, and heavy winds and tides isolate the island from all shipping from November until March or April of each year.

Kili Island is almost devoid of marine resources. The absence of a lagoon completely eliminates the type of fishing to which the Bikinians were accustomed. Surf and sea conditions at Kili prohibit the use of sailing, sea going canoes once used on Bikini, and these have fallen into disrepair. The fringing surf prevents any vessel of size from approaching closer than several hundred yards from Kili. Off-loading of supplies is often impossible, and when possible, it is both dangerous and costly. The reef itself is dense and homogeneous and does not support lobsters, other mollusks, or varieties of reef fish. For a fishing people accustomed to an atoll, Kili is a prison; the reef and surf isolates them and prevents access to the even limited marine resources available beyond the fringing reef.

Kili had been a copra plantation during Japanese and German times, and most of the arable land was planted in coconuts. When the Bikinians arrive in 1948, there were only a few pandanus and breadfruit trees, and none of the hardwood trees found on Bikini for use in house and canoe construction. Kili has agricultural potential, but for a marine-orientated people, accustomed to fishing and unaccustomed to tilling soil and cutting brush on Kili, agriculture has never been either rewarding or successful.

Life on Kili island has never been pleasant for the Bikini people. In the early years, and continuing to the present, the difficulties are too numerous to explain in detail. The heavy surf and sea conditions, plus frequent local ship shortages, usually prevented more than four visits a year by a field trip vessels. Failure of the field trips meant that the copra that the Bikini people had produced was left to spoil or be eaten by rats. Failure to pick up copra was strong disincentive to make it. Food shortages were again common and the people became convinced that Kili was another Rongerik. In 1949 and 1950 and again in 1952 food shortages occurred, severe enough so that in 1952 a ton of food was air dropped to the people. Even then, parachutes were not used, and the food was broken and ruined. The efforts at agriculture did not work and produced little food. The Bikinians were given one large ship, a converted forty-foot whaleboat, which was wrecked on the Kili reef soon after it was procured. The community was in debt and copra production was minimal. Then and now the Bikini people have an expression for Kili: Kili enana, meaning Kili is no good.

In 1953 a Kili development project was begun, based upon the United States government information that at Bikini atoll would not be habitable at any time in the near future. The development

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project largely involved importation of agriculture experts to tell the Bikini people how to cultivate important food crops such as taro, pandanus, limes, and other seedlings imported from other islands. Much of this agriculture program met with some success. Efforts were also made to placate the Bikinians by giving them several acres of land on Jaluit atoll, about 30 miles from Kili. However, that Jaluit land program was largely a failure, for many different reasons. The lands on Jaluit were seldom used because they were barren and without food trees, because travel between Jaluit and Kili was uncertain and infrequent, and because the Bikini people were most unwelcome at Jaluit and the Jaluit people disputed the title to Jaluit lands given to the Bikinians. After complaints had been made to the United Nations Visiting Mission, another boat was obtained for the use of the Bikinians. The Libra was old 54 foot mission vessel that the Trust Territory outfitted with a new engine and sails. The vessel, for the first time, alleviated the isolation of Kili and the failure of field trip ships to call more than once every six or eight months.

In November, 1957, typhoon Lola struck Kili, and devastated the new agricultural project and sank the Libra. All the taro was killed by salt intrusion, and 50% of the breadfruit trees were killed. In January 1958, another typhoon struck nearby Jaluit, wiping out most food trees there and creating widespread destruction. After the typhoon, most rehabilitation efforts went to Jaluit. The Bikinians were back where they were in 1948, except that by now there were more than 250 people living on Kili. Food shortages again ensued in 1958 and 1960, alleviated for short periods by the arrival of C-rations and other emergency foodstuffs. Relocation was again discussed by the United States government, but rejected. The Bikinians continued to complain about Kili and their prison. Kili enana.

Up through recent times, food shortages have occurred on Kili. Most recently, the U.S.D.A. food program has been extended to Kili. Field trip service is slightly more reliable. The fishing is still non-existent, and the island is still an island and not the home atoll of Bikini. All that is said above is simply a prologue, an introduction to the statement of the grievances and inequities that beset the Bikini people today.

In 1946, when the Bikini people were first moved from their home, the United States made no settlement with the people concerning Bikini. The United States did not inform the people that they had legal title to Bikini, and the Bikinians, even if they had such a concept firmly in mind, were too intimidated to state it. In 1956, after some adverse world publicity, the United States attempted to "settle" the Bikini problem. After several discussions, the

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government simply presented the Bikinians with a completed, non-negotiable document entitled "Agreement in Principle Regarding the Use of Bikini Atoll". The agreement specified that the United States would give the Bikini people \$325,000 and use rights on Kili and some islands in Jaluit, in return for use rights to Bikini atoll. It appears that the 25,000 one dollar bills taken to Kili with the document had the intended effect -- The Bikini people accepted the proffered agreement. \$25,000 was given in cash, to be divided among the people, and \$300,000 was to be set aside in a trust fund. The Trust Fund has been a miserable failure, and is one of the primary reasons for the continued grievance of the Bikini people.

The Trust Fund was to be established with \$300,000, according to the "Agreement in Principle": ". . . (b) the remaining \$300,000 to be placed in a trust fund to be established and administered by the High Commissioner . . ." In contrast to what the agreement says, the facts appear to be that a good deal less than \$300,000 was put into the Trust Fund. About 1970, the sale of the government bond that constituted the Bikini Trust Fund yielded only \$196,000. Had the bond be allowed to mature, it would have yielded \$309,000 in 1983. But a statement of yield is a far cry from what the "Agreement in Principle" promises. The people of Bikini want to know what has happened to the balance of the money allegedly invested for them. If the money was invested, what sort of trustee have they who would allow a \$104,000 loss over the years? If the money was not invested, then the \$100,000 or more that was omitted should be added to the Trust Fund now, with interest.

The income that has been derived from the Trust Fund is minimal. Until an amendment to the original agreement was made in 1971, the Trust Fund earned only 3 1/3% interest. Even now the income is only 9,035.28 per year, and amounts to no more than a pittance when divided among the Bikini people twice a year -- in fact, it comes to about \$12.00 for each person. The joys of having such a Trust Fund are obviously quite small.

In August, 1968, President Lyndon Johnson announced that some of the islands on Bikini atoll would be cleaned up and returned to the people of Bikini for resettlement. Certainly this was a day of rejoicing for the Bikinians, but subsequent events concerning the rehabilitation of their atoll have left them cynical and demoralized. The rehabilitation project has been bungled from the beginning.

In 1970 the Bikini people met with Trust Territory representatives to tell them that the contractor the Trust Territory had selected for the rehabilitation project was unacceptable. The

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contractor had been selected less than one week before the visit, and had not yet started work on the project. Nevertheless, the Trust Territory did nothing about their request. The contractor was apparently selected for political reasons. The Trust Territory has persisted in doing nothing, and the contractor has done the sort of job that the Bikinians were afraid he would do. The work is sloppy, subject to rapid deterioration, and above all, characterized by continuous unexplained delays. It is almost three years since the contractor was engaged, but the houses are still not ready for the Bikini people. The people have continued to complain about the buildings, but nothing has been done to correct the problems.

In addition to problems with the contractor, the rehabilitation project has been mismanaged from the beginning. The most notable characteristic of the program has been its constant series of delays, most of which are apparently the result of incompetence in the various offices in Saipan. From the beginning there have been delays in material; lack of qualified supervisors, poor relations between the Trust Territory supervisor and the contractor, and continuous breakdowns in communication. The whole project is typified by the series of events following the May, 1972 inspection visit to Bikini. The Bikinians had various complaints to make about the housing. Through their OEO attorney, they requested changes be made, in a letter sent to the Director of Public Works in Saipan. Several months later the letter was answered and the changes were by and large agreed to. However, in a November visit, the Bikinians discovered that none of the changes had been made, and that the exchange of letters had been wholly irrelevant to what the contractor was doing. The inspection trip was pointless, except that it proved that things had changed only for the worse, and that earlier mistakes complained of had occurred over and over again.

The funding for the rehabilitation of Bikini has been a constant source of irritation, puzzlement, and confusion for the Bikini people. No one has seen fit to provide them with statements that detail the source or expenditure of funds apparently appropriated for their benefit. The fact that the Bikini people have not been informed about the fiscal aspects of the rehabilitation is a major error. It should be corrected at once. Experience has shown the Bikinians that trustees who are allegedly acting for their benefit cannot always be trusted, and it is of vital importance that full disclosure be made to the Bikini people of all monies appropriated, allocated, or spent on the Bikini rehabilitation project.

Several funding problems stand out among the overall confusion. First, it is assumed that money for the Bikini rehabilitation project was separately appropriated, or at least taken from military or AEC - but not Trust Territory - sources. The total funding for

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the Bikini rehabilitation project is reported to be 2.88 million dollars, including radiological clean up. In spite of the size of the rehabilitation project, and in spite of the apparent source of the funding, it appears that the Trust Territory government has submerged all the Bikini rehabilitation money in the Trust Territory General Fund. Under these circumstances, it is necessary for the Bikini project to undergo periodic review to determine if it will be continued during the next fiscal period, and to determine what priority the Bikini rehabilitation project has in the ever changing Trust Territory list of Capital Improvement Projects. The point is that the funds for the Bikini project should have long ago been set aside, to be used only for the rehabilitation of Bikini atoll, instead of being put in the Trust Territory coffers where the funds are subject to misuse and the project subject to unnecessary cutbacks and unauthorized review by the Trust Territory government.

Secondly, the 2.88 million dollars apparently programmed for Bikini includes \$245,000 for "administration" and \$248,800 for "resettlement". Have these funds been expended? If so, on what? It is simply mind-boggling that the mis-management, bungling, and lack of judgment shown by the maladministration of the Bikini project should cost \$245,000.

Thirdly, the budget information available to the Bikinians shows that the money for the rehabilitation of both Kili and Ujelang atoll came from the Bikini rehabilitation budget, despite promises to the contrary. The Bikini people were specifically told that the money for the improvement of their Kili housing would not come from the Bikini rehabilitation funds; that Ujelang should be rehabilitated with Bikini funds is simply outrageous.

Fourth, in 1970, the High Commissioner "borrowed" \$200,000 from the Bikini rehabilitation fund for use on a starfish eradication program. He never asked, nor told, the Bikini people about this. He has never accounted to them for it, and to this day the Bikini people feel cheated of another \$200,000. It is another example of the maladministration of the Bikini rehabilitation project, and it is another source for their intense mistrust of their "trustee".

Finally, the people of Bikini do not know when they will be able to move back to their homeland. When they do move back they will find it changed and bulldozed and radioactive. It is uncertain -- in spite of AEC statements to the contrary -- that residence there will be safe. There is still a question of radioactive danger, as evidenced by the fact that the AEC required a four-inch concrete floor in the Bikini houses.

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The purpose of this letter is to show the treatment of the Bikini people by the United States government, and to detail the sufferings and grievances of the displaced people of Bikini. They have endured endless broken promises; three forced relocations of their homes; malnutrition and near-starvation; atomic destruction of their homeland and irradiation of their soil; deterioration of their social structure and loss of a sense of community; loss of many skills required for fishing on an atoll; isolation and rejection by the government, and the certain risk of living with the dangers of radioactivity. For all of this they have received a trust fund that loses money, some surplus U.S.D.A. food and an isolated and miserable island far from their home. Surely the United States will not ignore their rights and complaints. Surely they are entitled to at least the same treatment that was awarded to the people of Enewetak.

In 1970, the United States government made an "ex-gratia" payment to the people of Enewetak, now residing on Ujelang, of \$1,020,000, in payment for the sufferings they had endured. The Enewetakese clearly deserve such a payment. But the people of Bikini have perhaps suffered much more at the hands of the United States atomic-test program than the people of Enewetak. Yet they have received a great deal less. All they now ask is similar treatment and a similar trust fund that will enable them to reach a state of self-sufficiency. Now is the time to open discussions on such a subject, and act according to the resolution passed by the Congress of Micronesia on January 30, 1973, and attached herewith. The people of Bikini look forward to a prompt answer from the United States government.

Sincerely yours,

MICRONESIAN LEGAL SERVICES CORP.
Counsel for Bikini People
HAMLET J. BARRY, III and
JAMES LICKE

By: 

Hamlet J. Barry, III
Directing Attorney, Marshalls

cc: Mr. Rogers C. Morton
Secretary of the Interior
Washington, D. C.

Honorable Edward E. Johnston
High Commissioner, TTPI
Saipan, Mariana Islands 96950

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

TO: *Secretary Mather*

FROM: Richard M. Fairbanks

*For your direct
response.*

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