

UNITED NATIONS  
TRUSTEESHIP  
COUNCIL



Distr. GENERAL 408310

T/PET.10/40  
29 February 1968

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

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PETITION FROM MR. TOND JERKINS CONCERNING THE  
TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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Killi Island  
Marshall Islands  
Trust Territory of the  
Pacific Islands

15 February 1968

President  
Trusteeship Council  
United Nations  
New York, N.Y.

Dear President and Members of the Trusteeship Council;

My wife and I are living on Killi Island in the Marshall District of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. We have been here since September 1967; we teach English to the students here as members of the Peace Corps.

The history of the Killi people is available in the work by Leonard Mason entitled The Bikinians, a Transplanted Population. I ask your indulgence, however, for a brief synopsis. When the United States wanted a Pacific atoll for atomic testing, they chose Bikini. The people living there were 'asked' to temporarily relocate. After a long search, the island of Killi was selected and the people moved; there had been 2 previous moves to Ronrik and Kwajelein Atolls. This has now been their temporary home for 20 years! They don't want to stay on Killi, and they give many convincing arguments. We feel their arguments are worth being listened to, and we want you to be aware of their unnecessary hardships.

These people have been transferred from a typical Marshallese atoll to a single island. What does this mean? It means there is no lagoon. This is the crux of the Killi problem. A lagoon is the staff of life to the Marshallese; it provides their

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food and an excellent harbour for ships when trading and loading exports. An atoll generally consists of many islands that can be used for various purposes. Finally, medical patients are afforded a safe evacuation in the sheltered waters of the lagoon.

Killi is a single island surrounded by treacherous waves. This accounts for very poor fishing and hazardous trading situations much of the year. The canoes of these people are in a constant battle with the ocean, and occasionally the ocean wins. A few months ago when the sea was "calm", one fisherman tried his luck - the outcome was a broken canoe and no fish. During the months December to March no one attempts canoe fishing; one look at the ocean and the reason is clear. During these months the people must buy their food from the field trip ships.

The frequency and efficiency of the field trip ships seems incredibly bad to those of us who have come from a country with a highly organized transportation system. However, I will discuss them here only as they relate to the Killi situation. Generally, these ships come every 3 or 4 months. The last ship stayed 16 hours, but because of the waves it was unable to do any trading. It departed with the promise that it would return when finished with its other stops. The ship did return, but it was now very poorly supplied. The people could not buy all the supplies that were needed. One major item, kerosene was unavailable; and this was the second ship which had come to Killi with no kerosene. Thus these people had not been able to buy kerosene for more than 6 months. However, most important the food supplies were inadequate; thus, during the most difficult months for fishing, the supply of canned food was inadequate.

A lagoon is surrounded by many islands; Bikini is an atoll surrounding a lagoon. The Marshallese generally use their land area on an atoll in this way; one or more of the larger islands are used for living area, others are used to provide coconuts, as sanctuaries for birds and turtles, and as natural "pens" for livestock, mainly pigs and chickens. Killi as a single island offers no such resources. Turtles generally avoid inhabited islands, and the Killi men only rarely are able to catch any. On Killi, the pigs live right in the village with the people, as do the chickens. I think you can easily see the superiority of an atoll to an island as suited to the Marshallese way of life. What advantages does Killi provide? It is described as a "lush" southern island, and there is no question that Killi gets a good deal more rain than Bikini does. The major Killi handicraft product is a straw

bag. Making these requires a large amount of fresh water. Of course, this handicraft production developed after these people moved to Killi. However, I don't think the abundant water supply impresses the Killi people as much today for they realize that rain brings swamps and swamps are breeding grounds for mosquitoes. Now they face the problems of infections from the mosquitoes and flies; no one is without sores or scars. They didn't die of thirst on Bikini, but they do become ill from infections.

One advantage of coming to Killi was the fact that it was uninhabited. The first two settlement attempts were unsuccessful because the original inhabitants were unwilling to give up precious land. But what was done with the land on Killi? The people have all crowded together in a narrow strip of land near the beach while over 90% of the island is still uninhabited. The crowded conditions go against the Marshallese customs; there is now severe overcrowding with the increase in population. Sanitation has become a problem. Animals, garbage, insects, all kinds of wastes are concentrated in this small area. Regardless of where the fault lies, the situation exists, and no one likes it.

Why did the Bikinians decide to leave their atoll? Of course, the bomb. But one wonders how well they understood the situation. One Peace Corps Volunteer inquired, and the reply implied that they never understood the intentions of the United States very clearly. Some have said that they left Bikini because they were told that the atoll would be bombed whether they left or not! I don't know if this is true, but it is something to think about. These are naïve people, and they are easily impressed.

For all their trouble, the Killi people received \$25,000 cash and \$300,000 placed in bonds from which they receive the interest. This is not a spectacularly large amount but neither is it a trifle. As we examine the reality, however, we are less and less impressed. The money settlement was not made until 1957, ten years after they were moved! There was no retroactive clause or arrears paid. The interest from the trust fund will arrive on this field trip ship ... exactly \$12 per person. This amount is paid semi-annually. It does not amount to much on an island where the cost of one gallon of kerosene is \$1. These people are not satisfied; they want to go home.

Finally there are two examples of another kind of hardship these people endure. The magistrate of Killi, a traditional leader, is dying of cancer. He has been to

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Hawaii for the removal of the tumor, but his cancer is terminal. About 2 months ago, he called on me to radio for a ship to be diverted to Killi to take him to Majuro, the District Center. The ship came, but the waves caused a 20 minute operation to last almost 2 hours. Even with an outboard motor boat, fighting these waves is a hazardous operation. On the island now we have a 15-year old girl who has symptoms of appendicitis. A ship was diverted to Killi, but the girl could not be removed. Again the waves were the problem. That same night, Killi students returning to Majuro had to swim past the surf and board the outboard which would take them to the ship. One Killi man swam all the way to the ship just to confer with the captain and explain the landing situation.

Hope and I ask, the Killi people ask, and now we hope you ask, "Why can't the Killi people return to Bikini?" We have a letter in our possession addressed to the Killi magistrate from High Commissioner Norwood. This letter gives the people hope and confidence because in it the High Commissioner says, "it may be possible to resettle Bikini in the not too distant future ... Mr. Rasmussen (of the Atomic Energy Commission) told me that the Atomic Energy Commission scientists have decided that Bikini is now ready for human habitation." It is NOW READY for human habitation. This letter was dated September 1966. When is the near future?

A recent Senatorial visit to the Marshall District brought the following statement from Senator Moss of Utah when queried about the Killi people: "They can return to Bikini as soon as it is cleared of radioactivity." According to Mr. Rasmussen, it has been cleared. Obviously, these contradictory statements can only add tension and suspicion to the situation. I believe that a clear, straightforward statement should be made. Those who are responsible for the decision should take a firm step toward getting these people back to their land.

Can your Council look into the Killi situation? Please don't give these people lip service. Don't just tell them you know of their problem, but help them solve it. They want to go home. We can see no reason why they should live under these conditions. If Bikini is free of radiation and is fit for human habitation, please call on the United States to return these people to their homes.

Sincerely

(Signed) TODD JENKINS  
Todd Jenkins  
PCV KILLI ISLAND