STATEMENT OF THE ENEWETAK/UJELANG LOCAL GOVERNMENT COUNCIL BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

February 22, 1994

Submitted by
The Honorable Ismael John
Senator, Nitijela of the Marshall Islands; and
The Honorable Neptali Peter
Mayor of the Enewetak/Ujelang Local Government Council

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of this Committee:

Thank you for providing this opportunity to the people of Enewetak to discuss issues relating to radiation exposure from fallout and the resultant health effects on our population.

With us are Mrs. Tokko Henry Peter, Mr. Johnson Hernest, and Mr. Davor Pevec, our legal counsel.

Mrs. Tokko Henry Peter is Mayor Peter's wife. In 1947, Tokko along with the other Enewetak people, was moved from Enewetak Atoll to Ujelang Atoll by the United States because the United States wanted to use Enewetak Atoll as a nuclear test site. Ujelang is 120 miles southwest of Enewetak. Because of the prevailing trade winds, Ujelang is downwind of Enewetak.

Forty-three nuclear devices were exploded on Enewetak. The most powerful explosion was the "Mike" test which occurred on October 31, 1952. Mike was the world's first thermonuclear (hydrogen) bomb test. The yield was 10.4 megatons (750 times greater than the Hiroshima bomb), equivalent to 10.4 million tons of high explosives. The test was located on the island of Bokombako (sometimes refered to as Elugelab). Bokombako was vaporized by the Mike test and in its place was a crater more than a mile in

diameter and 200 feet deep. The United States' Defense Nuclear Agency described the test as follows:

> "A large fireball, 3-1/2 miles in diameter and followed by a wave of water, swept across neighboring islands. Trees and shrubs facing the test site on the island of Biken were scorched and wilted, although they were located 14 miles southwest of the Mike shot site."

Prior to the Mike test, the United States came to Ujelang and placed the Enewetak people on a ship which sailed southwest from Ujelang towards an island named Kosrae. We were told we must go on the ship for our safety because a test was planned.

After a number of days of sailing, we were awakened just before dawn and told to look at a particular direction on the horizon. We then saw an enormous bright light in the direction of Enewetak. We were told that what had occurred was a test on Enewetak. We were terribly sad. Some of us cried because nothing could survive the enormity of such an explosion. We thought, surely Enewetak was no more; our ancestral homeland was gone to us forever.

After the explosion, we were returned to Ujelang. When we came ashore we noticed that virtually everything was covered by a fine dust. We noticed a whitish film on all of our individual and community water catchments.

The United States personnel from the ship came ashore and took away several instruments they had placed there when they came to pick us up. No one told us what the fine dust was or what the whitish film on our catchments was. We drank, cooked and washed with the catchment water. Within a few days our skin became

extremely itchy. Rashes and sores developed on skin. Some people had their hair fall out. We had no idea what afflicted us.

Several years later, we learned about fallout. It was then that we associated those ailments to the fallout from the Mike test.

We returned to Enewetak in 1980. We live on the four southern islands. The rest of the islands in the atoll are contaminated by radiation to one degree or another. We understand that there is radiation contamination in the silt of the lagoon.

We are told that living on the four southern islands is safe. We were told that living on Ujelang would be safe. Now we are not so sure. Over the years a number of our people have become afflicted with thyroid nodules, thyroid cancer and other types of cancers. Tokko herself is a victim of thyroid cancer. Nine other members of our community have developed thyroid problems and/or cancers.

That is why we are here today. We are here to lend support to your Committee's quest to find out what really happened in the Marshall Islands as a result of the nuclear testing program. We also would like to have all documents declassified so that the full record can be reviewed and analyzed.

In the meantime, it is imperative that Brookhaven National Laboratories, through funding provided to the Department of Energy, conduct thorough and adequate monitoring of our population. That monitoring includes whole body counting and urinalysis for plutonium detection. In recent meetings with Brookhaven and the

DOE, representatives of both organizations stated that each member of our population should undergo whole body counting every two years. Unfortunately, that frequency has yet to be achieved. In addition, we understand that cesium cannot be detected after one year. Accordingly, annual whole body counting may be more appropriate. We are willing to discuss with the DOE and other scientists the optimal frequency of such monitoring. We would be pleased to report to this committee the results of such discussions.

In addition to the whole body monitoring, our environment must be monitored to assure that our people are not adversely affected by the residual radiation contamination on our atoll. Runit island is a radiation waste storage site. It must be monitored as any storage site would be monitored in the United States. Unfortunately, monitoring over the past 14 years has been minimal and superficial. A plan, consistent with U.S. monitoring regulations of nuclear waste sites, should be implemented and carried out. Also, the remainder of Runit should be surveyed to determine its current status and to determine methods to render it less dangerous for our people.

We have for too long relied on the representations of others when it came to the effects of the testing program. It is time that we be provided all data so that we can have such data analyzed to our satisfaction. Only in this way will be able to determine

the origins of some of our afflictions and plan for a future free from the harm of the nuclear age.

We thank the Chairman and the Committee members for their interest in our welfare and their pursuit of truth on our behalf.