

April 20, 1954

to: The United Nations

from: The Marshallese people.

Subject: Complaint regarding the explosion of lethal weapons within our home islands.

Petition received by United Nations from TTP with 111 Marshallese signatures on April 30, 1954.

"The following should not be misconstrued as a repudiation of the US as our governing agency for the UN under the trusteeship agreement, for aside from the complaint registered in this petition we have found the American Administration by far the most agreeable one in our memory. But in view of the increasing danger from the experiments with deadly explosives thousands of times more powerful than anything previously known to men, the lethal effects of which have already touched the inhabitants of two of the atolls in the Marshalls, namely, Rongelap and Uterik, who are now suffering in various degrees from 'lowering of blood count,' burns, nausea and the falling off of hair from the head, and whose complete recovery no one can promise with any certainty, we, the Marshallese people feel that we must follow the dictates of our consciences to bring forth this urgent plea to the UN, which has pledged itself to safeguard the life, liberty and the general well-being of the people of the trust territory, of which the Marshallese people are a part.

The Marshallese people are not only fearful of the danger to their persons from these deadly weapons in case of another miscalculation, but they are also very concerned for the increasing number of people who are being removed from their land. Land means a great deal to the Marshallese. It means more than just a place you can plant your food crops and build your houses; or a place where you can bury your dead. It is the very life of the people. Take away their land and their spirits go also.

The Marshall Islands are all low coral atolls with land area where food plants can be cultivated quite limited, even for today's population of about 11,000 people. But the population is growing rapidly; the time when this number will be doubled is not far off.

The Japanese had taken away the best portions of the following atolls; Jaluit, Kwajalein, Eniwetok, Mille, Maloelap and Wotje to be fortified as part of their preparation for the last war, World War II. So far, only Imedj Island on Jaluit Atoll has been returned to its former owners.

For security reasons, Kwajalein Island is being kept for the military use. Bikini and Eniwetok were taken away for atomic bomb tests and their inhabitants were moved to Kili Island and Ujelang Atoll, respectively. Because Rongelap and Uterik are now radio-active, their inhabitants are being kept on Kwajalein for an indeterminate length of time. 'Where next?' Is the big question which looms large in all of our minds.

Therefore, we the members of the Marshallese Congress hold-over committee, writers of this petition, who are empowered by the Marshallese Congress, to act in its name when it is not in session and which is in turn a group of members representing all the municipalities in the Marshalls, due to the increasing threat to our life, liberty, happiness and possession of land, do hereby submit this petition to the UN with the hope that it will act on our urgent plea. Thus, we request that:

1. All the experiments with lethal weapons within this area be immediately ceased.
2. If the experiments with said weapons should be judged absolutely necessary for the eventual well-being of all the people of this world and cannot be stopped or changed to other areas due to the unavailability of other locations, we then submit the following suggestions:

- a.** All possible precautionary measures be taken before such weapons are exploded. All human beings and their valuable possessions be transported to safe distances first, before such explosions occur.
- b.** All the people living in this area be instructed in safety measures. The people of Rongelab would have avoided much danger if they had known not to drink the waters on their home island after the radioactive dusts had settled on them.
- c.** Adequate funds be set aside to pay for the possessions of the people in case they will have to be moved from their homes. This will include lands, houses and whatever possessions they cannot take with them, so that the unsatisfactory arrangements for the Bikinians and Eniwetok people shall not be repeated.
- d.** Courses be taught to Marshallese medical practitioners and health-aides which will be useful in the detecting of and the circumventing of preventable dangers.

We would be very pleased to submit more information or explain further any points we have raised that may need clarifications.

The Marshallese people who signed this petition are on the following sheets, divided in the following manner:

The first group are members of the Marshallese Congress holdover committee. The second group are some of the many interested Marshallese citizens. The name of each person appears on the left-hand side and his or her home atoll and occupation on the right-hand side opposite the signature.

If more signatures are needed we will promptly supply them. The only reason we are not supplying more now is because to do so would mean a delay of some three months, the time necessary to make complete circuit of our far-flung atolls and islands by ship.”

Source: United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, United Nations Affairs, Vol. 3, 350/5-354: Telegram, The Deputy United States Representative at the United States (Wadsworth) to the Department of State, New York, May 3, 1954.
Online: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v03/d933>.