

For Rongelap medical
survey file
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PUBLIC MEETING AT RONGELAP - 12:00 NOON - FEBRUARY 20, 1961

(Notes taken by John deYoung, Liaison Officer)

Distad Finale introduced himself as new Distad and then the Chairman.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Introduced members of the Mission. Noted that all the members were aware of problems of Rongelap but wished to hear from the people their own feelings on health aspects and other problems of the community.

John ANJAIN, Congressman (Former magistrate): Welcomed the Mission. Wished to know present status of fallout problems on the island.

Mr. FINALE: In the last session of the Marshalls Congress, there was a resolution on this item which also mentioned certain foods. I checked with Dr. John Iaman on these items. He informs me that the resolution was in error in reference to foods except for the coconut crab. As I recall, resolution stated that the people could not eat clams, oysters, etc. According to Dr. Iaman's information from AEC and Trust Territory Public Health Department, these are perfectly safe to eat.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Dr. Iaman, is your knowledge of this matter based on the medical and other studies done here? How did you reach the conclusion about food poisoning here on Rongelap?

Dr. JOHN IAMAN: Only true food poisoning I am aware of is a number of fish poison cases which were similar to fish poison cases we have in other parts of the Marshalls. My information on the ban on eating coconut crabs here comes from the AEC scientific teams which have studied Rongelap.

Mr. SALAMANCA: I presume that poisonous fishes existed before the fallout here? And that these poisonous fishes are known to the people? Also that these fish are poisonous for varying reasons?

Dr. JOHN IAMAN: As I stated, our conclusion is that the present fish poison problem is similar to that found in other parts of the Marshalls.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Who reached this conclusion?

Dr. JOHN IAMAN: My local staff who handled the cases.

Mr. SALAMANCA: I would like to direct my question on poisonous fish to one of the older men here. Did you have poisonous fish before?

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: As far as he can recall there were never any fish poison problem in this atoll before the fallout. (Man was in mid-forties)

Mr. NELSON (Rongelap Agriculture Extension Agent): I was born here and am 36 years old. I know, and my father who was born here knows, certain fish which are always poisonous. These we have always avoided. Our problem now is that formerly good fish now are poisonous.

Mr. SALAMANCA: What do the poisonous fish look like?

Mr. NELSON: (1) Briefly described several wellknown poisonous fish of the area. These have always been avoided. (2) Now one of our best tasting fish, known to us as "ellek", has become poisonous. People get boils in their mouth and bad stomach from eating "ellek." The stomach of the "ellek" now contains a black substance which never was there before 1954.

ENOS (Congressman): Corroborated Nelson on the unknown black substance or spots now found in the "ellek."

Mr. SALAMANCA: Were samples of this fish given to the Administration and AEC?

JABWE (Health Aide): Said this had not been done by him but would show it to AEC team when they came again.

_____ : Stated that he worked for the AEC team when it comes to Rongelap and had shown these black spots on the "ellek" fish to the team. The team took samples for testing.

Mr. SALAMANCA: We will ask the Administration to follow up on this.

We have heard about a malformed baby being born here. Is the mother or father here? Will you describe the child?

ENOS: I am the father of this child but I was on Majuro attending the Congress Session when it was born.

JABWE: (Health Aide) The baby was normal except it lacked the top of the head. You could see the brain. The baby lived a week.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Were the AEC doctors able to see the child?

JABWE: No - but information was passed to the Kwajalein doctors. (In answer to a question from the Chairman, he stated that Navy plane had brought the Navy doctors to Rongelap while the child was still alive.)

Mr. FINALE: Asked Congressman Enos if he and his wife had been on Rongelap during the 1954 fallout.

ENOS: Said that he and his wife had returned to Rongelap in 1957 and had not been in the fallout.

Mr. SALAMANCA: I understand a law suit has been filed on your behalf against the U.S. Government. According to law, this is your right. Do not be afraid because your administrator is here. It is the law of his country. We will ask the Administering Authority for a full scientific report on the questions you raise.

Would Congressman Anjain give us some information on this law suit?

ANJAIN: The people here have discussed this problem amongst themselves.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Was this handled for you by Mr. Amata Kabua?

ANJAIN: We consulted with him before he went to the United Nations last year.

Mr. CASTON: How does the copra production compare now with previous production?

WOMAN SPEAKER: Before the war, everything on this island was alright. This is not so now.

Mr. RASGOTRA: What is the difference?

WOMAN SPEAKER: I wish the Mission could have seen our coconut trees on the North Islands before. Now we have three crowned trees growing there.

Mr. CASTON: I understand that there was an agriculturist stationed here. Did he examine these trees?

WOMAN SPEAKER: Yes, but we were given no explanation as to why they are growing like this.

At this point one of the men showed a photograph of the three crowned coconut palm and indicated that there were some 20 trees of this type growing in the North Islands at the time the photograph was taken.

Mr. RASGOTRA: Is the fruit or nuts alright?

ANSWER: These trees have not produced any nuts thus far.

Mr. CASTON: I would like to ask again about copra production. What was the copra production last year.

Mr. FINALE: We will provide this information for you from the official trading company records.

Mr. CASTON: We note that many more people live here now than before the fallout. If things are not good on this island, why is this?

ANSWER by woman speaker: She doesn't know.

Mr. CASTON: What are other changes you have seen?

WOMAN SPEAKER: One is arrow root and the other, the coconut crab. The arrow root now makes us sick. We get boils in our mouths and get running stomach from eating arrow root. This never happened before.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Dr. Isaax, what are your comments on the arrow root problem?

Dr. JOHN LAMAN: This is the first time that I have been aware of the fact that the arrow root here produces this effect.

Mr. RASGOTRA: Is this the experience of any others here?

GENERAL ANSWER: Yes, we have been getting sick from eating arrow root.

JABWE: In the northern part of the atoll, fish cannot be eaten since they make the people ill. As far as the arrow root and coconut crab goes, we assume that they have more radiation because they come from the ground and perhaps the ground has retained more radiation.

Mr. RASGOTRA: As Health Aide, do you feel the arrow root cases are warranted or accurate?

JABWE: Yes.

Mr. FINALE: If this is so, why have no reports been submitted to the AEC teams who come here or to the Administration?

JABWE: I have sent reports to the District Center.

Mr. RASGOTRA: Have you reported this to the AEC doctors?

JABWE: All this information was given to the AEC men.

Dr. JOHN LAMAN: There has been no mention in your monthly reports to my office on these arrow root cases. I go over your reports carefully every month.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Why is this? Did you make the reports orally?

JABWE: Yes, I told the officials orally.

Mr. RASGOTRA: Read paragraph in 1959 Visiting Mission report on the Rongelap people's concern over their health, etc. Asked if Dr. Iaman had ever seen the 1959 Visiting Mission report.

Dr. IAMAN: Indicated that this 1959 Report had not been circulated in the District or at least not to his department. On one occasion a case of fish poisoning in Rongelap was brought to his attention. It was similar to cases of fish poisoning occurring also in other parts of the Marshalls.

Mr. FINALE: When was the last time eating of arrow root caused the cases of boils and upset stomachs?

GENERAL ANSWER: Some people said as recently as a few days previously, others indicated they had experienced this last December.

Mr. RASGOTRA: What is your status as health aide here (to Jabwe). What is your training? Can you get in touch with higher medical authorities if necessary?

JABWE: I was first trained as a health aide by the Navy and then later had a refresher course at the Majuro Hospital. My schooling was 6 years of elementary school at a Mission School during Japanese times.

We can contact Kwajalein or Majuro by radio for medical help.

Mr. RASGOTRA: How often does a qualified doctor visit this place? How long does he stay? I am referring to regular medical care not the AEC medical teams.

JABWE: A Trust Territory doctor comes to visit us about once every three months on the field trip ship. He stays about 3 days or so.

Mr. RASGOTRA: Except for the boils and upset stomach trouble, do the people here think their health is alright? Do they feel physically fit to carry on daily life?

ANJAIN: (Congressman) Since the fallout, health of the people has deteriorated.

Mr. RASGOTRA: Is the health of your children satisfactory?

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: We have had deformed children born which we never saw before.

Note: Here followed a long discussion on various abnormal children stated to have been born since the 1954 fallout.

A father who had been in the fallout stated that right after the group came back to Rongelap, his wife had an abnormal child with a head shaped like that of an octopus. The baby died the day of birth. (Note: the reference to the octopus head very likely is his way of trying to describe a hydrocephalic infant).

A woman who bore an abnormal child on Ejit stated that her baby was born dead - was only skin and bones. In reply to a question by Chairman Salamanca, she stated that it was a 9-month pregnancy. She also stated that she had borne two children since that time - or rather one miscarriage and one normal child. Normal child had nothing wrong with him except "bleeding umbilical cord at birth."

Mr. RASGOTRA: What do you people think should be done here to allay your apprehensions?

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: Would like to have improvement here.

Mr. CASTON: Why are so many more people here than in 1954 if things are so difficult here?

Mr. RASGOTRA: How many were here at time of fallout and how many here now?

ANJAIN: There were 84 here in 1954 at time of fallout. Approximately 244 here now.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Pointed out that these are all Rongelap people. Some were working on other islands, at Ebeye, etc. at time of fallout.

Mr. CASTON: If so many left the island before, why did they all decide to come back at the same time.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: We have many cases of intermarriage here. In these instances, custom is that you live for a time in each home island of the spouse.

Mr. SALAMANCA: Which group has been suffering the cases described here the most?

JADWE: (Health Aide) Feels that the fallout group are rather weak. Those not in fallout but who have returned appear to be more affected by the food (arrow root, etc, which has ill effects.)

After a few more general complaints that food crops not enough for present population and copra yield does not permit people to buy all they need, the session ended with the following summary by the Chairman.

Chairman SALAMANCA: Things that happened here are very complex and very important to the world. All these events will be studied very carefully. We will ask the doctors and Administration to check every possible fact.

The United Nations will do its part to protect the people of this stall. Hope that someday your fears will disappear so that you will be able to live as before.