

The Legacy of U.S. Atomic Testing in the Marshall Islands: U.S. Accountability

WHEREAS, in the Old testament the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the Israelites: When a man or a woman wrongs another, breaking faith with the Lord that person incurs guilt and shall confess the sin that has been committed. The person shall make full restitution for the wrong, adding one fifth to it, and giving it to the one who was wronged." (Numbers 5:5-7 NRSV) And in the New Testament Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." (Luke 19:8 NRSV)

WHEREAS, the Marshall Island government has indicated that new information on the health of its people exposed to radiation from atomic and nuclear testing in the Marshalls requires more just compensation and expansion of medical care than the \$150 million trust fund provided in the Compact of Free Association;

WHEREAS, evidence from recently declassified U.S. government reports and studies shows that many more Marshall Islanders were exposed to nuclear fallout from the 67 U.S. atomic and nuclear tests than American negotiators admitted when the compensation package in the Compact was negotiated in the early 1980's;

WHEREAS, many questions are arising about the accuracy of medical research done by U.S. Government labs on Marshall Islanders who were exposed to fallout from atomic and nuclear testing;

WHEREAS, although the U.S. Government provided full compensation to American citizens living downwind of the Nevada Test Site, Marshall Islanders have not received more than 61 percent of their total awards because the compensation level is inadequate;

WHEREAS, fully one-third of the 1,574 Marshall Islands recipients of nuclear test awards have died without receiving full compensation;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Government provided full compensation to American citizens living in a significantly larger area compared to the Marshall Islands, despite the fact that the total tonnage of U.S. tests in the Marshall Islands was almost 100 times greater than the yield of tests at the Nevada Test Site;

WHEREAS, documents now show that the people of Ailuk and other nearby islands were exposed to dangerous amounts of radiation, yet purposely were not evacuated;

WHEREAS, the Marshall Islanders are increasingly becoming aware that Islanders were not evacuated DESPITE information that prevailing wind would blow fallout over a number of inhabited islands and that they were likely being used as "guinea pigs" in radiation studies;

WHEREAS, U.S. Government representative deceived the people of Bikini Atoll by telling them that their island would be used "for the benefit of mankind;"

WHEREAS, the March 1, 1954, "Bravo" hydrogen bomb test at Bikini Atoll was detonated despite weather reports the previous day that winds were blowing to the east toward the inhabited atolls of Rongelap, Utrik, Ailuk and others;

WHEREAS, a 1985-1989 health survey in the Marshall Islands revealed cancer rates 2 to 30 times higher among Marshall Islanders than in the U.S.;

WHEREAS, a nationwide survey of thyroid problems in the Marshall Islands in the mid-1990's by doctors from Tohoku University in Japan confirmed a high rate of thyroid disorders among Marshall Islanders;

WHEREAS, the economic provisions of a Compact of Free Associate implemented in 1986 will expire in 2001 and are up for renegotiation in 1999;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Government has not yet apologized to the Marshallese people for the death of Marshallese citizens and for the damage done to the homeland and people;

WHEREAS, the United Church of Christ is the main religious denomination in the Marshall Islands;

WHEREAS, there are many United Church of Christ Marshall Islanders in Hawaii and other western states;

WHEREAS, the \$150 million trust fund provided in a compact of Free Association with the Marshall Islands is woefully inadequate and not just compensation for the health injuries and deaths caused by U.S. nuclear testing to the population and the loss of their use of their atolls because of radiations contamination since 1946; and

WHEREAS, U.S. funding for medical surveillance and treatment programs is inadequate to meet the needs of the exposed population in the Marshall Islands;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-second General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls upon the United Church Board for World Ministries and its successor to work closely with the Marshallese people, our ecumenical partners, and the Office for Church in Society and its successor to bring about an official apology and full redress including all necessary funding from the U.S. Government; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be sent to the President of the United States, the U.S. Attorney General, the Secretary of the Department of Energy, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and each member of the U.S. Congress, with copies to the Republic of the Marshall Island Embassy Office in Washington, D.C., and to the people in the Marshall Islands.

Funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.