
NITIJELA OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS
41ST CONSTITUTION REGULAR SESSION, 2020



Republic of the Marshall Islands
Jepilpilin Ke Ejukaan

RESOLUTION NO. 15ND1

A **RESOLUTION** expressing, on behalf of the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, profound appreciation and gratitude for the valiant efforts and enormous sacrifices of thousands of Americans who participated in the radiological cleanup of Enewetak Atoll from 1977 through 1980.

WHEREAS, Bikini Atoll and Enewetak Atoll were devastated by 67 nuclear weapons tests during the U.S. nuclear testing program from 1946 to 1958, with 43 of those tests having occurred at Enewetak Atoll; and

WHEREAS, in order to allow for the use of Enewetak Atoll as a nuclear test site, the indigenous people of Enewetak Atoll—including the dri-Enjebi from the northern part of the atoll and the dri-Enewetak from the southern part of the atoll—were evacuated by the U.S. in 1947 to the uninhabited, resource-poor atoll of Ujelang; and

WHEREAS, at the time of their exile to Ujelang, the U.S. government had informed the people of Enewetak that they would be able to return home after a short period of time, no more than three to five years; and

WHEREAS, in 1968, after over 20 years of being virtually abandoned in abject poverty on Ujelang, the exiled people of Enewetak Atoll mounted a protest in which they seized and occupied a U.S. supply ship that was visiting Ujelang; and

WHEREAS, the protest ended after two weeks, but set in motion a series of events that would eventually lead the U.S. to revisit its long-forgotten promise that the people of Enewetak Atoll would be allowed to return home; and

WHEREAS, from 1977 through 1980, the radiological cleanup of Enewetak Atoll was conducted under the leadership of the U.S. Department of Defense; and

WHEREAS, over 8,000 people participated in the cleanup, including U.S. military personnel from the Army, Navy and Air Force; officials and contractors from the U.S. Department of Energy; and civilians from the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands including Marshallese, and other U.S. government entities; and

WHEREAS, the cleanup workers adopted colorful nicknames: many of them were based on Lojwa Island and called themselves the "Lojwa Animals"; those who worked on the highly radioactive island of Runit called themselves the "Runit Glow-By-Nighters" or the "Runit Rats"; and

WHEREAS, the cleanup workers were not properly informed of the steps they needed to take to protect themselves from exposure to the radiation and toxins that abounded in their environment; they worked long hours under the hot sun, usually shirtless and with no protective gear; and

WHEREAS, by living and working in parts of Enewetak Atoll where nuclear tests had occurred, the cleanup workers exposed themselves to numerous harmful radioactive isotopes that could enter their bloodstream through the dust they inhaled, through the locally sourced food and water they consumed, and, in some cases, through proximity to contaminated material; these included various radioactive isotopes of plutonium, with half-lives of up to 24,100 years; americium-241, with a half-life of over 430 years; cesium-137, with a half-life of over 30 years; and strontium-90, with a half-life of almost 30 years; and

WHEREAS, the cleanup workers were unaware that Lojwa Island, where many of them lived, had been the site in the 1960s of a secret U.S. military testing program for chemical and biological warfare agents; or that Enjebi Island, where many of them worked, had been the site of a failed rocket test in 1968 that spilled 300 pounds of extremely toxic beryllium over a wide area; and

WHEREAS, after the radiological cleanup was completed in 1980, the people of Enewetak Atoll were finally able to return; and

WHEREAS, the atoll that the people of Enewetak returned to in 1980 was significantly diminished from the one they had left 33 years prior: entire islands had

been vaporized; much of the atoll remained too contaminated for habitation or even food gathering; the dri-Enjebi could not return home to the still-contaminated northern part of the atoll and had to resettle with the dri-Enewetak in the southern part of the atoll; much of the atoll's fertile topsoil had been scraped off in the cleanup; and approximately 110,000 cubic yards of nuclear waste collected from around the atoll had been left in an unlined crater, capped off with a concrete dome, on Runit Island; and

WHEREAS, many of the former cleanup workers have experienced serious health issues in the years since their mission was completed, including various types of cancers, respiratory disease, skin rashes, autoimmune conditions, brittle bones, cracked teeth, and reproductive health issues; and

WHEREAS, many of the former cleanup workers have died young, and continue to succumb to their illnesses at an alarming rate; and

WHEREAS, on its website, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs continues to insist that "veterans who participated in the cleanup at Enewetak Atoll encountered low levels of radiological contamination, and have a low risk of health problems"; and

WHEREAS, veterans of the Enewetak cleanup contend that the U.S. government's position is largely based on faulty radiation readings from dosimetry badges that were rendered useless by being coated in plastic and frequently exposed to water; and

WHEREAS, because the U.S. government denies that the Enewetak cleanup veterans were exposed to excessive radiation, the veterans are refused the benefits that the military provides to those with ailments resulting from their service; and

WHEREAS, many of the cleanup veterans therefore have to endure the crushing burden of paying for expensive medical care for their life-threatening ailments; and

WHEREAS, many of the cleanup veterans report that the military has lost their records, which further hinders their efforts to obtain proper care and benefits for their illnesses; and

WHEREAS, the cleanup veterans are not considered "atomic veterans" under U.S. law because they were not present during the actual nuclear tests; they are hence denied the benefits that atomic veterans are entitled to; and

WHEREAS, the cleanup veterans have, over the last few years, organized to advocate for their cause and have diligently worked to uncover information about the health risks they were exposed to during their time at Enewetak; and

WHEREAS, much of the information the cleanup veterans have discovered about the hazards they were exposed to also raises questions about health risks that may have been faced, and may continue to be faced, by the resettled indigenous community on Enewetak Atoll; and

WHEREAS, in recent months, the cleanup veterans have shared with Enewetak's representatives a great deal of important information, based on the veterans' own personal experience and on documents that they have obtained, on matters that include the use of Enewetak Atoll as a base in the 1960s for the testing of chemical and biological warfare agents; the spill of 300 pounds of highly toxic beryllium over Enjebi in 1968; the fact that the amount of radioactive waste that was dumped into Enewetak's lagoon dwarfs the amount that was buried under Runit Dome; the mishandling of a large number of highly radioactive soil samples that were supposed to have been buried under Runit Dome but were instead dumped into Enewetak's lagoon; and the fact that the U.S. transported 130 tons of presumably contaminated soil from the Nevada nuclear test site to Enewetak Atoll and spread it across the ground there; and

WHEREAS, the cleanup veterans from all across the United States have consistently demonstrated great solidarity and friendship with, and respect and empathy for, the Marshallese people, and recently made the gesture of gathering in Springdale, Arkansas to spend Nuclear Remembrance Day with the large Marshallese community there; and

WHEREAS, the cleanup veterans have found common cause with the Marshallese people, as both groups have suffered great health and other consequences because of the U.S. nuclear testing program and the U.S. government's failure to provide them with proper information on a timely basis; and

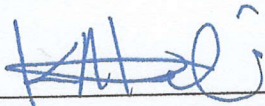
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the people of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, through their Nitijela in its 41st Constitutional Regular Session, 2020, that the people and Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands express their solidarity with and support for the Enewetak cleanup veterans as they fight for justice and recognition, and further express their sincere gratitude for everything that the cleanup veterans have done to enable the people of Enewetak to return to their atoll, and everything that they continue to do to help the Marshallese people uncover the truth about the U.S. nuclear testing program and its aftermath.

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify:

1. That Nitijela Resolution No. 15ND1 was passed by the Nitijela of the Republic of the Marshall Islands on the 28th day of August 2020; and
2. That I am satisfied that Nitijela Resolution No. 15ND1 was passed in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the Rules of Procedures of the Nitijela.

I hereby place my signature before the Clerk this 9th day of September 2020.

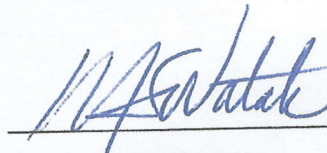


Hon. Kenneth A. Kedi

Speaker

Nitijela of the Marshall Islands

Attest:



Morean S. Watak

Clerk

Nitijela of the Marshall Islands

