

63RD NUCLEAR VICTIMS REMEMBRANCE DAY KEYNOTE REMARKS

Her Excellency President Hilda C. Heine, Ed. D

Traditional Leaders of the Marshall Islands, Chairman Iroijlaplap Kotak Loeak
and members of the Council of Iroij;

Cabinet members;

Speaker Kenneth A. Kedi, Vice Speaker Jejwadrik Anton, Nitijela Senators;

Chief Justice Carl B. Ingram and members of the Judiciary;

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;

Mayor Ladie Jack and the Leadership of Majuro Atoll; Mayors from other
jurisdictions from throughout the RMI;

Reverend Enja Enos and members of the Clergy;

Members of the Business Community, Non Governmental Organizations, Civil
Society Organizations; fellow Marshallese in attendance here this morning at the
Capitol Building and those tuning in on radio and via the Internet:

Please join me in observing a moment of silence in memory of the victims of the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program and their families.

It was an honor to join our leaders from the Four Atolls in leading the Remembrance March with individuals, participating schools and community groups. This was a very moving start to this solemn occasion of the 63rd Nuclear Victims Remembrance Day. As we gather here today, I have no doubt that Marshallese throughout the Republic and abroad are also joining us as we commemorate, pay our respects and recognize those who have lost so much. We join the families of the victims, both living and those who have passed on, and remember their experiences of hardship and suffering which began in 1946 and, unfortunately, has not ended. We pay tribute to the rapidly declining number of survivors, to those modern-day nomads who cannot return to their homeland due to radiation. Inevitably, we think about the children, who will take our place many years from now, and remember what we are remembering here today, the unequalled sacrifice of a peaceful people, of Marshallese people, for the “good of mankind” which was the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program conducted from 1946 to 1958.

Today is an emotional day for our national conscience as we face the reality that, after the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program first began with the moving of

Bikinians from Bikini Atoll, 71 years of inconsolable grief, terror, and righteous anger followed, none of which have faded with time. This is exacerbated by the U.S. not being honest as to the extent of radiation, and the lingering effects the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program would have on our lives, ocean and land, and by the U.S. not willing to address the issue of adequate compensation as well as for the radiological clean-up of our islands.

“Journey Towards Justice” is the theme for today, which includes the Nuclear Legacy Conference that will begin later today until Friday at ICC. In truth, this “Journey Towards Justice” began years ago with our predecessors and Nuclear Champions who petitioned the United Nations in the early 1950s, like late Dwight Heine, former President Amata Kabua and his mother, Leroij Tarjikit,; the leadership of the 4 Atolls like former senators Jetton Anjain, Ismael John, Henchi Balos and Tomaki Juda; strong women leaders like Lijoon Eknilan and Darleen Keju-Johnson; current leaders and activists such as Ambassador Tony deBrum, Abaaca Anjain-Maddison, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner; and countless other Marshallese who traveled to distant countries to talk about the Nuclear Weapon Testing program, to seek Nuclear Justice for the Marshallese people. Many others who are not Marshallese, have worked as tirelessly as us in researching and bringing to light new information necessary to make our case heard. Previous presidents and

administrations have contributed substantially to this effort. For their dedication and commitment, let us also honor them today.

The leadership of the Four Atolls and other individuals and non-governmental groups have also contributed their shares, including efforts that have paved the way towards obtaining further information behind the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program through the declassification of formerly known “secret” or “classified” documents. Unfortunately, most of these declassified documents have been redacted to the point of being rendered inadequate in our pursuit of the truth.

Substantive steps were taken over the years to address our Nuclear Legacy, some of which include:

- 1) The submission of the Changed Circumstances Petition (CCP) pursuant to Section 177 of the Compact which contained claims for further compensation for loss of lives and damages to properties as a consequence of the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program;
- 2) The United Nations Special Rapporteur’s Report on the human rights implications of the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program on the Marshallese people which was submitted to the Human Rights Council in September, 2012; and

3) Court cases filed in the U.S. judicial system as well as in the International Court of Justice.

The U.S. Government's response has been that our CCP does not fulfill their criteria of changed circumstances. In relation to our cases, the U.S. courts have said that they cannot interfere in a bilateral treaty, the Compact of Free Association, under which section 177 provisions were included to address the nuclear issues.

Where do we go from here? What is left for us to do? Are the victims of the U.S. Nuclear Testing Program to be relegated to simply commemorating their memories and, more importantly, their sacrifice, on March 1 every year?

My Administration will follow in the footsteps of the leaders of the past and continue in this collective quest for Nuclear Justice. As your President, I cannot and will not accept the position of the United States government. The merits of our Changed Circumstances Petition are indeed justified when taking into account certain declassified documents that were made available, albeit redacted, many years after the Compact.

For example, studies from the early years which were not known to the RMI government during the compact negotiation process, have now shown that 18 other

inhabited atolls or single islands were contaminated by three of the six nuclear bombs tested in Operation Castle, as well as by the Bravo shot in 1954. The myth of only four ‘exposed’ atolls of Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap and Utrik, has shaped U.S. nuclear policy on the Marshallese people since 1954, which limited medical and scientific follow up, and compensation programs. In fact, other studies since have made reference to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission report entitled, ‘Radioactive Debris from Operation Castle — Islands of the Mid-Pacific,’ issued on January 18, 1955 but not publicly released until May 1994, nearly 40 years after it was issued.

Unlike the U.S., we acted in good faith. That is why ours is a moral case for which we are more than justified to seek redress commensurate with the damaged inflicted on the people and their islands.

I pledge that the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands will spare no expense in developing and employing strategies that will bring about in-depth information on, and greater understanding of, the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program. This is a difficult promise to fulfill, full of technical and political complexities. The road ahead will not be an easy one and there may times when we will falter and question the pragmatism of our objective. However, for those we are remembering today, those who survived a horrifying period of our history, for

their families and loved ones, we must keep the faith and work hand-in-hand to bring about the Nuclear Justice deserving of their memory.

To begin the renewed quest for nuclear justice, my Cabinet, along with the support of the *Nitijela*, has developed and adopted into law the National Nuclear Commission. This demonstrates not only to the Marshallese people but also to the U.S. and the international community that we stand resolute in our pursuit of Nuclear Justice. The Commission's purpose includes the development of a detailed strategy and plan of action in pursuing nuclear justice, coordinating and integrating present and future efforts, and serving as a repository for findings, conclusions and records from past activities. The Commission is also authorized to work with researchers, journalists, filmmakers and others who seek to study anything related to the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program and its effects. The outcome of the Nuclear Legacy Conference this week will help inform the work of the Commission. Other efforts in this quest for justice include the engagement at the national and international levels, of outside expertise and legal assistance.

I encourage everyone to attend the Nuclear Legacy Conference, which begins this afternoon, and will feature presentations, guest lectures, panel discussions and various displays, exhibits, demonstrations and side events. In addition, a film

festival will take place at the CMI Court, which will show videos and movies related to the U.S. Nuclear Weapons Testing Program. Everyone is invited.

As I conclude, I wish to take this opportunity during this most solemn of national occasions to call on our friends, the Government and people of the U.S., to change the tides so that we may together convert the Nuclear Legacy into Nuclear Justice. I also remind President Donald J. Trump that in order for America to be great again, it must fulfill on its promises made to the Marshallese people 71 years ago.

To my fellow Marshallese, the good Bible teaches us that the truth shall set you free. Let us remember that too. Thank you very much.