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SEC 125/23

June 17, 1955

COPY NO. 18

ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

COMMITMENTS TO MARSHALL ISLANDERS

Note by the Secretary

The attached letter to the Secretary of the Interior, with enclosures, is circulated for the information of the Commission.

W. B. McCOOL  
Secretary

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UNITED STATES  
ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

June 8, 1955

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am enclosing herewith a copy of a letter which I have addressed to Assistant Secretary of State David McK. Key\* setting forth data concerning the fulfilment of U.S. Government commitments to the Marshall Islanders adversely affected by the nuclear experiments in the Pacific. A copy of the Commission's letter of December 2, 1954 to Secretary Dulles on this subject was furnished you.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

Chairman

Enclosure

Ltr from Strauss to Key

The Honorable Douglas McKay  
The Secretary of Interior

Department of Energy  
Historian's Office  
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\*Similar letter sent to Secretary of Defense.

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UNITED STATES  
ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

June 8, 1955

Dear Mr. Key:

In your letter of May 2, 1955\* you asked the Commission to advise the Department of State of any data additional to that provided in our letter of December 2, 1954\*\* regarding steps taken to fulfill the U. S. Government's commitments to the Marshall Islanders adversely affected by the March 1, 1954 nuclear weapons test in order that the U. S. Delegation to the Sixteenth Session of the U. N. Trusteeship Council can give a full and satisfactory report on the subject.

As you know, the Commission's letter of December 2 to Secretary Dulles outlined in some detail the status of several major programs being undertaken to assist the Marshall Islanders. Since that time the Commission has constructed a radio transmitter and receiver on Uliga Island in Majuro Atoll and a radio transmitter and receiver, six family units and two storage buildings at Jabor Island in Jaluit Atoll. It was also originally planned to erect a radio transmitter and receiving station as well as build a storage house and repair two others on Kili Island. It was later determined by the High Commissioner, however, that there was no longer a need for a Kili radio station. Construction and repair of the storage houses on Kili Island was not undertaken by the Commission because adverse weather conditions did not permit landing of material and personnel on the Island. The material for this construction was left on Jaluit, and we understand that the Government of the Trust Territories now feels that there would be definite advantages to having Kili inhabitants construct the buildings themselves.

In January 1955, the Commission conducted a radiological survey of Rongelap Island and examined soil samples, crabs, shellfish and foodfish, and such edible flora as coconuts, pandanus and arrowroot. In our letter of December 2, the Commission stated it was our view that the residual level of radioactivity would decay to insignificance allowing the resettlement of the natives on their home island by May 1955. This has not been possible, however, because the shellfish and crabs, which constitute an important part of the natives' diet, still contain unsafe amounts of radioactivity. Furthermore, the northern islands of the Atoll are still sufficiently radioactive so that persons living on them would receive radiation exposures somewhat above those recommended by the National Committee on Radiation Protection and the International Commission on Radiological Protection. I am attaching for your further information on this point copies of letters exchanged by the Deputy High Commissioner of the Trust Territories and the General Manager of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Secretariat Notes: \*Circulated as AEC 125/19.  
\*\*Circulated as AEC 125/15.

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As you know, the Commission has accepted the responsibility for periodically examining the Rongelap natives as a routine precautionary measure. In March 1955 a second medical recheck was conducted under the leadership of Dr. Eugene P. Cronkite of the Commission's Brookhaven National Laboratory, accompanied by Lt. Cmdr. Samuel D. McPherson, an ophthalmologist presently on duty at the Naval Medical Hospital at Bethesda, and Dr. Charles L. Dunham, Deputy Director of the Commission's Division of Biology and Medicine. The survey team found that the Rongelapians are in excellent general health with the exception of a few individuals suffering from chronic diseases which were present prior to March 1, 1954 and unrelated to the fallout incident. All individuals' white blood counts fall within the normal range, although the mean for the entire group is somewhat below that of the control population. All skin lesions have healed. Dr. McPherson, at the request of the native ophthalmologist, performed a number of cataract operations. None of the cataracts, however, were related to the effects of the March 1, 1954 fallout.

It was also pointed out in our earlier letter that the Commission, in cooperation with the Trust Territory and the University of Hawaii, was investigating the possibility of undertaking certain agricultural programs to increase food production for the Marshall Islanders. The Commission has offered to assist the Government of the Trust Territories in any way possible in researches directed toward crop improvement in the Marshall Islands, but, thus far, no specific request has been received by the Commission for assistance.

For your information I am attaching a list of the major categories of expenditures incurred by the Commission for the various activities covered in this letter. In addition to these, we understand the Commander, Joint Task Force-7 will have expended \$133,203 by June 30, 1955 for rehabilitation of the Marshallese, \$50,365 of which was reimbursed to the Commission for construction of housing on Ejit Island in the Majuro Atoll for the temporary resettlement of the Rongelapians.

I hope the information set forth in this letter will assist the Department in preparing its report for presentation at the Trusteeship Council this month.

I have taken the liberty of sending copies of this letter to Secretary Wilson and Secretary McKay.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

Lewis L. Strauss  
Chairman  
Department of Energy  
Historian's Office  
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Enclosures

Mr. David McK. Key  
Assistant Secretary  
Department of State

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AEC EXPENDITURES INCIDENT TO NATIVE REHABILITATION -  
OPERATION CASTLE

1. September 1954 Medical Re-examination	\$9,840	
2. January 1955 Radiological Survey	3,300	
3. March 1955 Medical Re-examination	<u>13,000</u>	<u>\$26,140</u>
4. Construction of Facilities on Uliga and Jabor Islands approximately		<u>\$58,000</u>
Total expenses through June 30, 1955 (app.)		\$84,140

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TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS  
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER  
P. O. BOX 542  
AGANA, GUAM, M. I.

Serial 1723

May 9, 1955

Mr. K. D. Nichols  
General Manager  
U. S. Atomic Energy Commission  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Nichols:

The information about the present condition of Rongelap Atoll contained in your dispatch 271613Z and your letter dated April 26, 1955 (BM:JCB) was, in general, most welcome.

It is gratifying to know that the level of radioactive contamination has fallen to a point in the southern islands of the Atoll where the return of the inhabitants can now be permitted. Nevertheless we are naturally concerned about the exclusion of the more northern islands from the safe occupancy area and about the dangerous residual contamination in the mollusks and crustaceans even in the southern half of the Atoll. Although the Rongelapese have been alerted to the dangers of radioactivity, we anticipate something less than 100% cooperation in the avoidance of these areas and foods were the people to return home. The northern islands, while small, are economically not unimportant in their life and will almost certainly be visited to some extent despite the ban. Moreover, clams and crabs form traditionally a part of their normal diet; it would be unrealistic to suppose that these would be avoided by all at all times, particularly since their consumption would have no obvious and immediate bad effects. There simply is no practical way to police the people if they were to return home; even the taboo has all but lost its force in the Marshalls.

In view of these facts the Trust Territory is most reluctant to encourage the return of the people to their Atoll at this time. Furthermore, both the staff at Headquarters and in the Marshalls, with whom I have discussed the matter, feel it would be a serious error in judgment to allow the Rongelapese to express their wishes on the question. In brief, we have reached the decision that the Trust Territory should not permit the Rongelap people to return to an area of known radioactive danger and thus place itself in the position of being morally responsible for any violation of the rules of safe conduct which would be necessary for the present.

We suggest, therefore, that the Rongelapese be kept on Ejit for at least another six months in the hope that at the end of

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this period a study of the shellfish and crabs and of the islands of the north will reveal so significant a decrease in the contamination level throughout that the people may at least be repatriated without danger. It is to be understood, of course, that during this interval they will have to be supported to the present extent of approximately \$1,300.00 monthly.

In summary, we shall take no action leading toward the repatriation of the Rongelap people until further discussions can be held with the Atomic Energy Commission or until we receive from the AEC by letter more solid assurances of the safety of the Atoll than can now be given.

Sincerely yours,

/s/

D. H. Nucker  
Deputy High Commissioner

Department of Energy  
Historian's Office  
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UNITED STATES  
ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

June 6, 1955

Honorable Delmas H. Nucker  
Deputy High Commissioner  
Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands  
P. O. Box 542  
Agana, Guam, M. I.

Thru: Director, Insular Affairs Division  
Office of Territories  
Department of the Interior  
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. Nucker:

This is written in reply to your letter of May 9, 1955, in which you recommend that the Rongelapese be kept at Ejit for at least another six months in the hope that at the end of this period the radioactivity in the shellfish and crabs which constitute such an important part of the Rongelapese diet may have decreased to a level which makes these foods safe for consumption.

The results of the most recent radiological survey will be fully evaluated in the very near future, in order to ascertain how firm our preliminary estimates are. In any event, we will conduct a resurvey early in the fall of this year, following which we hope to be able to give you a clearer idea of precisely when it would be safe to return these people to their home atoll with a minimum of restrictions on their activities.

As to the matter of the \$1300 a month for support of the people so long as they remain at Ejit, I have requested that JTF-7 continue to provide these funds.

Sincerely yours,

Kenneth E. Fields  
General Manager

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