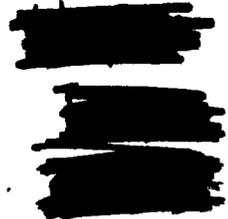




H65 #25



REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS  
MAJURO, MARSHALL ISLANDS 96960 • CABLE: REPMAR

March 22, 1990

Senator Atlan Anien  
Senator Ataji Balos  
Senator Alden Bejang  
Senator Ring Eliu  
Senator Report Emmius  
Senator Carl Heine  
Senator Hemos A. Jack  
Senator Imata Kabua  
Senator Michael Kabua  
Senator Hermios Kibin  
Senator Evelyn Konou  
Senator Lomes McKay  
Senator Leikman Robert  
Senator Litokwa Tomeing  
Nitijela of the Marshall Islands  
Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands

Dear Members of the Nitijela:

Thank you for providing me with a copy of your January 23, 1990, letter to Dr. Steven L. Simon, the resident scientist who is directing the nationwide radiological study pursuant to Article II, Section 1(e) of the Section 177 Agreement. In that letter you expressed concern that the study might be underfunded and recommended that Dr. Simon and the members of the Scientific Advisory Panel, as they develop their work plan, take into consideration prior studies of radiological conditions.

I know that Dr. Simon has taken action on your recommendation--and, indeed, he had anticipated the need you identified for evaluating earlier data. He will be preparing a comprehensive response to your letter.

I would like to comment on two aspects of your letter that relate to activities of the the Office of the Chief Secretary: (1)my testimony of November 16, 1989, before a subcommittee of the United States House of Representatives regarding the need for further scientific work at Rongelap Atoll, and (2)the conclusions of Dr. Henry I. Kohn, director of the Rongelap Reassessment Project, the contract for which was administered by the Office of the Chief Secretary.

Harry Brown NV

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In your letter you expressed concern that the amount of \$2.2 million that has been dedicated to the nationwide study might not be sufficient to complete the job satisfactorily. As justification for this view, your letter cited a portion of my response to a question from the Congressional subcommittee about the planned use of the \$3.0 million that is made available under the Section 177 Agreement for medical surveillance and radiological monitoring activities. You quoted part of a sentence contained in this paragraph of my testimony:

As we consider the limited amount of funding provided by the Section 177 Agreement for scientific work, my government recognizes that the nationwide radiological survey may have to be underfunded and that it may not be possible to survey the entire nation in the same detail that was applied in the 1978 survey of selected northern islands and atolls for which DOE expended \$5.1 million and benefited from significant in-kind contributions of transport and personnel from the U.S. Department of Defense. When the scientific advisory panel meets in its inaugural meeting later this month, the principal topic on its agenda will be the methodology for conducting a comprehensive survey on a comparatively small budget. In a planning document currently being circulated amongst the Scientific Advisory Panel, the option of a nationwide helicopter survey, similar in method to the 1978 DOE survey, is tentatively priced at \$4.4 million. Other, less expensive options are also under consideration.

Inasmuch as the opinion I expressed last November is central to your letter, I feel obligated to provide you with further explanation.

A year ago, in order to obtain guidance as I and other government officials were developing preliminary plans for the nationwide study, we sought cost estimates for various approaches for measuring levels of radioactivity throughout the nation. On March 23, 1989, I wrote to United States Representative Samuel B. Thomsen requesting technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in the form of a feasibility study that would outline the options and attendant costs for conducting a nationwide survey of radiological conditions. Upon receiving this request, DOE arranged for such a report to be prepared by EG&G Energy Measurements, Inc. EG&G was the technical firm that provided aerial measurements for DOE during the 1978 survey of the northern Marshall Islands. A copy of the EG&G report is attached. This report served as the basis for the portion of my testimony quoted above.

As you review the feasibility study, you will note that only one of the four options--the use of helicopters for surveying the entire nation--would exceed the \$2.2 million budgeted for this project. When the Scientific Advisory Panel met in November 1989, it rejected all of the airborne measuring options, since airborne detectors are not sufficiently sensitive to differentiate the low levels of radiation thought to be present outside the areas covered by the 1978 DOE survey. Instead, at the direction of the Scientific Advisory Panel, Dr. Simon has begun taking measurements for a ground-based study similar to the fourth option presented in the EG&G report. When the members of the Scientific Advisory Panel met with the Nitijela in January 1990, they made it clear that, as a result of (1) improved measuring technology, (2) a systematic process of preliminary screening measurements, and, (3) following the suggestion of your letter, a review of earlier studies, they will be able to accomplish the comprehensive nationwide study of radiological conditions with the amount of funding that has been dedicated to the project.

When I testified before the Congressional subcommittee last November, of course, I did not know which approach would be taken by the Scientific Advisory Panel.

I would like to offer clarification on a second aspect of your letter, and that is your understanding of the conclusions of Dr. Henry I. Kohn, the radiation specialist who directed the Bikini Atoll Rehabilitation Committee (BARC) and the Rongelap Reassessment Project. In the fifth paragraph of your letter you stated that "we now know from the Rongelap Reassessment Project conducted by Dr. Henry Kohn that the DOE 1978 survey was inadequate, that it did not provide [the people of] Rongelap with accurate or complete information about the radiation contamination of their atoll." This statement does not accurately characterize Dr. Kohn's conclusions.

It is important for the public of our nation to understand that the work of the Rongelap Reassessment Project largely substantiated the conclusions of DOE about the safety of living on Rongelap. Even though Dr. Kohn has criticized the simplified presentation of the DOE's findings published in the 1982 report entitled Melelen Radiation Ilo Ailiñ ko Ituiñ Ilo Majöl, ko Rar Etali Ilo 1978 ("The Meaning of Radiation for Those Atolls in the Northern Part of the Marshall Islands That Were Surveyed in 1978"), and even though the 1988 report of the Rongelap Reassessment Project recommended that certain additional studies be undertaken regarding the habitability of Rongelap, the accuracy of the DOE findings has withstood careful scrutiny.

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At the request of the Rongelap leadership, the Rongelap Reassessment Project included an investigative component for the gathering and radiological analysis of samples of vegetation, soil, and water from Rongelap and Ailinginae. The analysis was performed at laboratories in California and West Germany, entirely independently of DOE. Some of the analytic work was accomplished by Dr. Ute Boikat, a young German scientist appointed to the Rongelap Reassessment Project by the Rongelap leadership. As shown in the report of the Rongelap Reassessment Project, the statistics generated by these two independent laboratories confirmed the accuracy of the DOE data.

In response to the recommendations of the Rongelap Reassessment Project that further research be undertaken regarding (1) the levels of the radioactive element plutonium that might have been absorbed by former residents of Rongelap and (2) the levels of radioactivity that may in the future be absorbed by infants and small children living on Rongelap, the U.S. Congress provided funding for DOE to implement these recommendations. The DOE, in turn, contracted with the Brookhaven National Laboratory and the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to investigate these matters. After extensive research, the national laboratories concluded that residence in the southern half of Rongelap Atoll presents no significant risk of exposure to plutonium and no danger to infants and small children. This view has been accepted by Dr. Kohn. He testified to this effect at the November 16, 1989, hearing. I have attached to this letter a synopsis of his testimony which he sent to the ten other scientists of the Rongelap Reassessment Project.

In the interest of keeping the Nitijela objectively informed about the habitability of Rongelap, the same source that provided you with my testimony should have also shared with you the many other views that were expressed at the Congressional hearing, including Dr. Kohn's statement.

I hope that I have shed some light on the two points of your letter that concern the work of my office.

Sincerely yours,



Oscar de Brum  
Chief Secretary

cc: Speaker of the Nitijela