

# Submission by Society for Threatened Peoples

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## Republic of the Marshall Islands

The Marshall Islands, officially the Republic of the Marshall Islands is a Micronesian nation of islands and atolls in the Pacific Ocean. Between 1946 and 1958, the United States of America detonated 67 atmospheric and thermonuclear weapons, dropping a total of 76.8 megatons of nuclear bombs onto the atolls Bikini and Enewetak in the Marshall Islands. Most of the detonations centered around the Bikini Atoll. Due to high-altitude winds and other factors, the fallout spread across several islands in the area, including the Rongelap and Utrok Atolls. According to the advisor to the government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Dr. Holly Barker, nearly 1,000 Marshallese were contaminated during the tests. Thirty years after the tests, 95 per cent of the population alive between 1948 and 1954 had contracted thyroid cancer; also, a high proportion of their children suffered from genetic defects.

On March 1 1954, the U.S. detonated a 15-megaton hydrogen bomb, the equivalent of 1,000 Hiroshima-sized bombs, at Bikini Atoll. There had not been any warning for the people of Rongelap and other islands downwind of the blast. Radiocativity exposed the islanders to a near lethal dose of radiation, causing vomiting, skin burns and their hair to fall out.

They were evacuated 48 hours after the Bravo test but returned three years later and remained at Rongelap until 1985.

In 1985, the non-governmental organization Greenpeace evacuated the entire population of Rongelap and transported them to the safer island of Mejjatto 110 miles away. Greenpeace did at the request of Rongelap's representative to the Marshall Islands parliament. The U.S. government had previously resisted pleas from the Islanders to be evacuated. Studies conducted on Rongelap Islands after the residents had been evacuated showed that the atoll was still contaminated with high levels of radioactivity.

Nowadays, roughly 400 islanders live in a "temporary" community on Kwajalein Atoll, also part of the Marshall Islands. The U.S. government has threatened to cut off their funding in case they would not return to Rongelap until October 2011. Over the past 10 years the U.S. government has paid 45 million dollars to build a power plant on Rongelap, installed water desalination equipment, paved roads and build nine of a planned 50 homes for resettlement. Agricultural land has been doused with potassium fertilizer to prevent the roots of food crops drawing up radioactive cesium-137.

However, Society for Threatened Peoples is concerned about the scheduled return of the islanders. The president of the survivors group Erub -Erub is an acronym for the four nuclear test-affected islands Enewetak, Rongelap, Utrik and Bikini- stated that it was very hard for the survivors to trust the U.S. government. Erub and Society for Threatened Peoples urges the U.S. government to further commitments to provide safeguards and assurances. Most importantly, the acceptance of the Rongelap people to a return to Rongelap is the single most condition for a return. The U.S. government must not force them to return by October 2011 by threatening them to cut off their funding. Furthermore, since the population has grown significantly and the nuclear clean-up has focused on the main island, resettlement is currently impossible. The U.S. must fully cooperate with the islanders' demands.