

18 October 1976

The Honorable Peter Coleman, Acting High Commissioner
Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands
Saipan, Mariana Islands 96950

Dear Mr. Coleman:

As you know there have been certain complaints about health care by the people living on Utirik and Rongelap Atolls. The purpose of this letter is to solicit your advice and assistance with regard to a course of action for an extended health care program for the people on these two atolls, as well as the people returning to live at Bikini and Eniwetok and the organization of a meeting with the Marshallese to discuss these proposals.

ERDA has sponsored and strongly supported the team of doctors carrying out special medical examinations on these people over the past 22 years. It is our belief that most of the present complaints are based on misunderstandings and that it should be possible to clarify and resolve the issues to everyone's satisfaction. Accordingly, a meeting was held at ERDA headquarters on September 23, 1976, to discuss these matters. The meeting was attended by Drs. Conard and Kotrady from the examining team and other representatives from Brookhaven National Laboratory, ERDA and the Department of Interior. The following proposals were agreed upon:

1. Though there is no likelihood that any detectable radiation effects in the unexposed people living on Rongelap and Utirik will develop, and though these people have had the opportunity of being examined and treated by doctors of the medical team, both at the time of the annual surveys and on quarterly visits of the Resident Physician, a special effort would be made to systematically examine and treat all the people, including children, living on these atolls who wish to be examined. The exposed Rongelap and Utirik people and the unexposed Rongelap control group, as in the past, would receive special examinations for radiation effects and this group would continue to be entitled to the benefits of Congress of Micronesia's PL 5-52 as outlined in the agreement between ERDA and The Department of Interior.

2. It is not expected that there will be any detectable radiation effects in the people of Bikini and Eniwetok returning to live in the designated areas of their atolls. Therefore, no special examinations for radiation effects are considered necessary in these people. However, in view of possible psychological effects of living on these atolls, it is considered advisable to broaden their general health care in order to reassure these people. Such health care would include an annual medical checkup in addition to being seen at sick call on a regular basis. Routine checks of urine for radioactivity and whole body radiation measurements (non-medical procedures) would continue as before. Such continuing checks insure that any unexpected increase in radioactivity would be detected long before any hazardous levels were accumulated in personnel. The detection of minute amounts of plutonium

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and several other radionuclides in some of the Bikini and Rongelap residents is not considered to present a hazard. Low levels of these isotopes are found in people all over the world, including New York City. The pathways involved in the internal absorption of the isotopes are being investigated.

ERDA would continue to be responsible for treatment of radiation-related diseases that develop in the exposed people of Rongelap and Utirik. This includes specialized examination and treatment when necessary in hospitals outside the Trust Territory. All other treatment of individuals living on Rongelap, Utirik, Bikini and Eniwetok that cannot be accomplished by the examining medical team will continue to be the responsibility of the Trust Territory.

We would like to propose a meeting in the near future, perhaps by early December, at Majuro, Ebeye or possibly Honolulu with representatives of Utirik, Rongelap, Bikini and Eniwetok (perhaps the magistrate and a Council member from each atoll) and representatives of the Congress of Micronesia, Brookhaven National Laboratory, ERDA, Department of Interior, and the Trust Territory. We believe that such a meeting could result in agreements which would allow the medical examinations to proceed unhampered. We would appreciate hearing from you about these proposals at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

James L. Liverman

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cc: Mr. F. Zeder, Dept of Interior
Mr. O. DeBrum, Distad Marshalls, T.T.
Dr. M. Kumangai, Director Health Serv., T.T.
Congressman Ataji Balos, Congress of Micronesia
Congressman Charles Domnick, Congress of Micronesia
Dr. R.A. Conard, Brookhaven National Laboratory

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