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FM FCDNA ENEWETAK ATOLL MI

TO HICOMTERPACIS SAIPAN MARIANA ISLANDS

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PRESS OFFICER HICOM SENDS

PASS TO: PID

MNS ENEWETAK MARCH 16. EVERY SILVER LINING HAS A GRAY CLOUD. A PARTICIPANT IN YESTERDAY'S RETURN OF THE ENEWETAK PEOPLE TO THEIR ANCESTRAL HOME EXPRESSED ONE RESERVATION ALONG WITH HIS FEELING OF ELATION. THAT PERSON WAS REPRESENTATIVE ATAJI BALOS, 38, OF THE CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA WHO REPRESENTS NOT ONLY THE PEOPLE OF ENEWETAK AND UJELANG BUT THOSE OF BIKINI, KWAJALEIN, RONGELAP AND UTERIK.

BALOS, SPEAKING TO THE PRESS AFTER THE LUAU IN HONOR OF THE RETURNEES SAID THAT HE HOPES THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL HAVE A PROGRAM OF PERIODIC MEDICAL EXAMINATIONS FOR THE ENEWETAK PEOPLE.

HE SAID THAT THE "US HAS GAINED MUCH SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE BECAUSE

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OF THE TESTING AND SO IT SHOULD BEAR THE RESPONSIBILITY IF SOMEONE BECOMES ILL AS A RESULT OF LIVING ON THESE ISLANDS." BALOS NOTED THAT BECAUSE OF FALLOUT FROM THE BIKINI TESTS, THE PEOPLE OF RONGELAP AND UTERIK WERE STILL AFFECTED AFTER TWENTY YEARS. SAID BALOS, "I AM NOT A SCIENTIST BUT WHO KNOWS WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE."

BALOS ALSO EXPRESSED SOME DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE CONDITIONS AT JAPTAN ISLAND. HE SAID THAT ALTHOUGH JAPTAN HAS MUCH BETTER SOIL THAN UJELANG AND THERE IS MORE FISH IN THE LAGOON, THERE WAS NOT SUFFICIENT WATER FOR THE ENEWETAK PEOPLE WHEN THEY ARRIVED. HE SAID THAT THEIR MAIN STAPLES WERE BREADFRUIT AND PANDANUS AND YET THERE WERE ONLY COCONUT TREES ON JAPTAN. SAID BALOS, "I WISH THERE HAD BEEN MORE PREPARATION FOR THE RETURN."

REP. BALOS HAD PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN EFFECTING THE RETURN OF THE ENEWETAK PEOPLE TO THEIR HOME.

IN 1968, AFTER BALOS GRADUATED FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF GUAM, HE WORKED FOR THE TRUST TERRITORY GOVERNMENT AS AN ASSISTANT DISTRICT AFFAIRS OFFICER. HIS DUTIES CONSISTED OF TRAVELING TO THE VARIOUS OUTLYING ISLANDS BY FIELD TRIP VESSEL AND MEETING WITH THE ISLAND LEADERS TO LEARN OF THEIR PROBLEMS.

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EARLY ONE MORNING IN OCTOBER OF 1968, HIS SHIP DOCKED OFF UJELANG AND HE WENT ASHORE TO MEET WITH THE MAGISTRATE AND MEMBERS OF THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL.

HE WAS UNAWARE OF THE FACT THAT THE PEOPLE OF UJELANG HAD DECIDED TO ABANDON THE ISLAND AND SO WHILE THE COUNCIL WAS CONDUCTING THE MEETING, ALL THE REST OF THE ISLANDERS, OVER THREE HUNDRED OF THEM, WENT ABOARD THE FIELD TRIP VESSEL, CROWDING IT WITH MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM BOW TO STERN.

FINALLY THE COUNCIL TOLD HIM OF THE PLAN TO GO TO MAJURO AND TO ABANDON UJELANG. THEY TOLD HIM THAT "NOBODY REALLY CARES ABOUT US." THEY SAID THEY WERE VIRTUALLY STARVING AND DID NOT EVEN HAVE COPRA TO TRADE.

BALOS TOLD THEM; "I TOTALLY AGREE WITH YOU. GIVE ME A CHANCE TO SEE WHAT I CAN DO."

HE NOTED THAT THE SHIP WAS SEVERELY OVERLOADED AND HE FEARED THAT MANY PEOPLE WOULD DIE SHOULD THE SHIP LEAVE AND ENCOUNTER A STORM.

BALOS PLEADED WITH THEM TO COME OFF BUT THEY REFUSED. "THE WOMEN WERE PARTICULARLY ADAMANT" BALOS SAID.

THE MAGISTRATE, JOHN ABRAHAM, BROTHER OF THE CHIEF, SAID, "GIVE

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HIM A CHANCE." BUT MANY PERSONS REFUSED TO LEAVE THE SHIP. THE NEGOTIATIONS CONTINUED FOR FOUR HOURS.

FINALLY AN AGREEMENT WAS REACHED IN WHICH THE SHIP WAS TO PUT ASHORE WHATEVER FLOUR AND RICE WAS AVAILABLE. IN ADDITION, BALOS AGREED TO REMAIN BEHIND UNTIL THE SITUATION ON UJELANG WAS ALLEVIATED.

BALOS SAID THAT THE PEOPLE WANTED A FIELD TRIP VESSEL TO RETURN IN TWO WEEKS WITH SUPPLIES OR THEY WOULD "FEED HIM TO THE SHARKS." WORD WAS SENT BY THE SHIP'S CAPTAIN TO DISTAD MARSHALLS, DWIGHT HEINE, CONCERNING THE SITUATION ON THE ISLAND AND EXACTLY

TWO WEEKS LATER THE FIELD TRIP VESSEL RETURNED. BALOS SAID THAT THE PEOPLE WERE VERY HAPPY AND KILLED CHICKENS AND PIGS FOR A BIG PARTY. "THEY TRUSTED ME FROM THEN ON," BALOS SAID.

AFTERWARDS BALOS QUIT HIS GOVERNMENT JOB BECAUSE IT WAS TOO RESTRICTIVE. "I DECIDED TO RUN FOR THE CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA", BALOS SAID "SO I COULD DO WHAT I COULD TO HELP THE PEOPLE."

HIS FIRST TASK WAS TO INSURE THAT THE PEOPLE RECEIVED THE INTEREST FROM THE 1.4 MILLION DOLLAR TRUST FUND. THEN HE REQUESTED THAT A GROUP BE ALLOWED TO RETURN TO ENEWETAK AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, BALOS SAID, THEY LEARNED THAT A MISSILE TESTING PROGRAM

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WAS STILL GOING ON.

BALOS THEN WENT TO MICRONESIAN LEGAL SERVICES FOR HELP. THE MLSC FILED A LAW SUIT IN FEDERAL DISTRICT COURT IN HONOLULU FOR A RESTRAINING ORDER TO STOP THE TESTING.

FINALLY THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE AGREED IN 1972, TO BRING THE UJELANG COUNCIL MEMBERS TO MEET IN ENEWETAK. BALOS SAID "THEY TOOK US TO SEE THE CRATERS ON THE NORTHERN SIDE AND IT WAS THE FIRST TIME WE LEARNED TWO ISLANDS WERE GONE." "THE LANDOWNERS," HE SAID "WERE REALLY SAD THEIR ISLANDS HAD DISAPPEARED."

BALOS SAID THAT HE FELT THAT AT THAT TIME THE UNITED STATES HAD FINALLY BEGUN TO BECOME CONCERNED AND SOON THEY WERE GIVING THE PROBLEM THEIR FULL ATTENTION. SUBSEQUENTLY, BALOS SAID HE BEGAN TO FOCUS HIS ATTENTION ON THE OTHER PROBLEMS OF HIS DISTRICT.

BALOS CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT THE MOVE TO JAPTAN WAS NOT AN ALTOGETHER HAPPY OCCASION. IN ADDITION TO THE LACK OF PREPARATION HE CITED PREVIOUSLY, HE SAID IT WAS "VERY DIFFICULT FOR THE PEOPLE BECAUSE THEY HAD TO LEAVE THEIR FRIENDS AND RELATIVES." HE SAID THE ENEWETAK PEOPLE ARE A VERY CLOSE KNIT GROUP AND "THEY LIKE TO GO TOGETHER ALL THE TIME." THE REAL HAPPY DAY, HE SAID, IS WHEN "THEY ARE ALL HERE TOGETHER AND ARE SELF SUFFICIENT

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AT LAST."

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