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United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

July 20, 1979

Mr. Ralph Waltz
Box 208
Majuro, Marshall Islands 96960

Dear Mr. Waltz:

This is in reference to your letter of July 10, 1979, and the comments on the notes of the June 13, 1979, Bikini meeting.

Thank you for clarifying the status of Mr. Lekebol and also for your comments on Item 10 of the "Notes" of the June 13, 1979, meeting. We did have some questions with respect to the comment that considerable numbers of the residents of Bikini Island had been living on Rongelap at the time of the 1954 fallout since this is how we had interpreted Mr. Weisgall's statement. We will append an annotation to the June 13, 1979, "Notes" with your correction that the reference should have referred to individuals who had lived on Rongelap since 1957 onwards and who were eating local foods grown on Rongelap.

Your question with respect to the level of "Gamma Rays" being similar on Rongelap and Eneu is noted. I am referring this question to the Department of Energy for comment.

The statistics you compiled on the people who were removed from Bikini Island in late August 1978, are appreciated although I have some questions with respect to them. As part of the arrangements for the move, the Trust Territory contractor, Holmes & Narver, made a careful census in May 1978, by household on Bikini Island. This census was included in the May 1978, Relocation plan entitled "Relocation of Bikini Island Residents to Temporary Quarters". I enclose the census sheets from this plan for your information in the event you do not have them. I realize that the composition of the group had changed slightly by late August.

The questions we have relate to your comments that over half of the people who were relocated were not "Bikinians" and that most of them did not come from Kili Island.

The question as to who was a real "Bikiniian" was raised when Under Secretary Joseph, Deputy Under Secretary Wallace Green, and I visited Bikini Island and Kili Island last August. Mr. Oscar DeBrum, then District Administrator, informed us that except for a few local administration employees, the only non-Bikinians involved were those who were married to

cc: [Dr. Bruce Wachholz

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"Bikinians" or to people of "Bikini" descent. Even the bulk of the administration employees, as I understand it fell into this category.

The question of who can be considered a "Bikini" is a complex one as you know. Mr. Weisgall, the Legal Counsel for the people of Bikini, recently informed us that the list of "Bikinians" who claim some part of the Trust Fund payments now runs to well over 900 individuals. Again, as you know, many of these individuals have never lived on Kili or Bikini. All claim land rights on Bikini either through descent or marriage connections.

Also, before the relocation, the Bikini-Kili Council was consulted on several occasions with respect to locations of houses for the 28 families on Kili. Agreement on the weto arrangements on Kili Island was worked out. It does not seem realistic that the Bikini-Kili Council would have agreed on housing sites, etc., unless these 28 families had some claim either by descent or marriage, to land rights in Bikini Atoll. At the time of the move, the Andrew Jakeo clan and certain relatives of his did not elect to stay on Kili and they made up the original group which settled instead on Ejit Island.

Also the families involved were living in the houses built on wetos on Bikini Island assigned to "Bikini families". I do not have specific house numbers available here, but I doubt that complete outsiders without any "Bikini" ties would have been permitted to set up permanent residence on Bikini. Representatives of the Bikini-Kili Council regularly visited Bikini Island to distribute Trust Fund payments as well as to make inspection trips. Certainly, the Council would have protested if Bikini Island was being taken over by families with no claim of any kind to Bikini affiliation. We know also that there has been considerable intermarriage between the Rongelap and Bikini groups in recent times.

I am prepared, of course, to accept your statement that many of the group may not have come from Kili Island but as I noted above, there are hundreds of Marshallese with "Bikini" ancestry scattered throughout the Marshalls. To say that these individuals are not "Bikinians", would not be accepted by Marshallese tradition.

There seems to be discrepancy also in your claim that 71 of the people removed last August were Trust Territory Government workers or their dependents and only four of these were from Kili. The May 1978 Census shows eight families in this category with some 32 people involved. Additionally, by August, at least one or more of these families had been transferred by the Administration. As I pointed out earlier, District Administrator DeBrum explained in August 1968, that the bulk of these employees had married into "Bikini families". This appears to be further substantiated by cable traffic between the District Administrator and the High Commissioner at the time of the relocation. You may recall that a "moving allowance" was given the families who would be returning to Kili and a careful list was prepared. On August 23, 1978, Distad DeBrum notified the

High Commissioner that family heads, Toshiro Edmond, Agriculture Employee, and Ezra Jepwan, should be removed from the list of recipients since they were TTPI employees not returning to Kili. Other local employees, however, were slated to resettle on Kili presumably because of their marriage connections with Bikinians.

I do appreciate the comments in your letter and your interest in the problems of the people of Bikini.

Sincerely yours,

RUTH G. VAN CLEVE

Mrs. Ruth G. Van Cleve
Director
Office of Territorial Affairs

Enclosure