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The President announced today that plans are underway to permit the people of Bikini to return to their home atoll in the Marshall Islands. A special committee of consultants has reported to the Atomic Energy Commission that Bikini Atoll, site of more than 20 nuclear tests between 1946 and 1958, is again safe for human habitation.

The Defense Department has reported after a special study that the return of the people is consistent with security requirements. There will be a continuing requirement for the use of some sites on the atoll and there may be a need for Defense Department personnel to be stationed on the islands from time to time. These uses will not prevent the return of the people nor the re-establishment of their normal way of life.

Bikini Atoll is a ring of 26 coral islands, 25 miles long and 15 miles wide, on the northwestern fringe of the Marshall Islands. Before 1946, when the Bikinians were moved to make way for nuclear tests, about 150 persons lived on the atoll. They moved first to Rongerik Atoll and since 1948 have lived on Kili in the southern Marshall Islands. The Kili population is now about 300. A total of about 500 people regard Bikini as their traditional home, including some who work and live on other islands. Not all are expected to seek resettlement on Bikini.

Because of the dense overgrowth of the islands and the lack of any substantial quantity of foodstuffs growing on the atoll, an extensive clearing and replanting program will be required. In addition, housing and community facilities, such as a school, dispensary, and a water collection system, will be needed before the Bikinians can return from Kili.

The Bikini people will actively participate in both the planning and the execution stages of the resettlement program. The High Commissioner of the Trust Territory has been asked to request the Bikini people to name a group of their leaders to work with Trust Territory Government personnel and representatives of the United States Government in developing a comprehensive resettlement plan. This work is scheduled to begin with a visit to the atoll within the next few weeks by a team composed of Bikini representatives, and personnel from the Trust Territory Government, the Defense and Interior Departments and the Atomic Energy Commission.

It is the intent of the United States and the Trust Territory Government to work with the Bikini people in building a modern and model community on their atoll.