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Island of Hungry People

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Mike's - Marshall Islands
6/14/54

Senator Mike Mansfield (D) Montana

ISLAND OF HUNGRY PEOPLE

On June 14 I brought to the attention of my colleagues ~~here~~ in the Senate the plight of the peoples of the Marshall Islands who are suffering great inconveniences and hardships because of the Pacific hydrogen bomb tests in the spring.

The islanders petitioned to the United Nations for an assurance that they be considered before any future atomic or hydrogen tests were held in the area. These people are gravely concerned because they have been kept indefinitely from their home islands and were exposed to radiation during the March 1st test. United States Ambassador Lodge issued a statement reassuring the Marshallese that everything was being done to protect their interests. That is about all that has been done. A few words and no action does little to alleviate the natives' problems.

These people live on Kili, the "island of hungry people." They are Bikinians whose home atoll of Bikini was taken over eight years ago for testing of atomic weapons. These people are confined to this tiny island faced with hunger and lack of clothing. They have been looking to the United States for assistance and have received only broken promises.

These people's home, Bikini, is about ten times as big as Kili which is an oval island of about 120 acres, lushly overgrown. Fishing is poor at Kili while it was bountiful at Bikini. Much of the time the only food is coconuts and copra.

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The small island's population has increased from 160 to 190 in ^{the} nearly five years they have been on Kili.

The United States is failing in its responsibilities to these islands. We are obligated to them under the Trust Territory agreements of the United Nations.

I understand that steps are being taken to give these people technical help. The first project to help these people to adjust themselves was started only this year. It will be several years before much can be accomplished this way, ^{so} something must be done now, before it is too late.

The Bikinians were moved to Rongerik atoll for two years. Hunger finally drove them from there and the U.S. Navy placed them temporarily in the Kwajalean atoll. Most of their first dealings were with the Navy. In 1951 the Marshalls were placed under control of the Secretary of the Interior.

A medical practitioner from Majuro, headquarters for the Marshall Island district, reported the people were "pretty healthy." He had found no sign of malnutrition "although sometimes they do run short of food." We should not be satisfied with just a "pretty healthy" condition, we should make sure that these people do not suffer from malnutrition and they should not have to go hungry and without clothing at any time. We Americans seem to have forgotten that they willingly gave up their homes in order to help our advancement in atomic science. Hunger and discontent are rather poor compensations.

When King Juda was asked if the islanders were promised anything when they were moved he said the Americans told him, "you stand on big sand bank as children of America. We can never forget you. You gave up atoll so America can go ahead of everyone in world."

We apparently told them many things and it's about time we started making good some of those promises.

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