

STATEMENT CONCERNING UTIKIK GRIEVANCES

The following statements briefly outlines the background and development of the grievances expressed by the people of Utirik Atoll concerning the BNF sponsored medical examinations in their letter to Mr. Roger Ray of July 9, 1976.

Decisions regarding medical examinations and treatment of the Marshallese people exposed to fallout radiation during the past 22 years have been based on expert medical advice from outstanding specialists in the field of radiation effects, many of whom have participated in the examinations. In addition approval for the manner in which the examinations of the Utirik and Rongelap people were being conducted was documented by an observer group appointed by the Congress of Micronesia in 1972. This group consisted of several outstanding physicians from Japan, England and the United States.

Frequency of examinations; lack of expectancy of late thyroid effects:

Soon after the examinations of the Marshallese began in 1954, it was known that the Utirik people had received only a slight dusting of fallout with an estimated whole body dose 14 rads as compared with 175 rads in the Rongelap people. None of the Utirik people showed acute effects as did the Rongelap people and it was the general medical consensus that this group would not likely show detectable effects in the future and the people were told of this. It was decided that complete medical examinations every three years would be adequate for this group while annual examinations were indicated for the Rongelap people in view of the much greater exposure and acute radiation effects.* The degree of thyroid exposure from radioiodines

*In addition to the complete physical examination there have been thyroid and "stick calls" on an annual basis since 1968. Since 1954 the Utirik people have had complete examinations in 1957, 1959, 1963, 1969, 1972 and 1975. Also in various years there have been quarterly visits to Utirik as well as Rongelap by the resident physician.

absorbed from the fallout was not realized at that time, particularly in the children, and so thyroid effects were not anticipated even in the Rongelap group. In retrospect this is not surprising since only relatively recently has the degree of sensitivity of the thyroid, particularly in children, for the development of radiation-induced tumors begun to be appreciated. It is likely that the United States populations with thyroid exposure have not been as carefully followed as the Utirik population.

Control groups:

In 1954 an unexposed group of the Marshallese people living at Majuro was first chosen as a control group, but this group proved unsatisfactory and in 1958 a control population of some of the unexposed Rongelap people was established. These people were relatives of the exposed group and consisted of 150-200 people. This group is considered quite adequate as a control group for both Rongelap and Utirik people. The slight differences in ethnic background between the two populations did not constitute reasons for having separate control groups.

Children of exposed parents:

The children of the exposed islanders have not been included on the regular examination list. This has not been considered necessary since studies of considerably larger groups of children of exposed parents in Japan have not revealed any clear-cut genetic effects and it was therefore felt that such studies on the Marshallese children were not indicated. Though the children have not been included for regular examinations they are examined and treated ^{at sick call} during the visits of our doctors to Utirik and Rongelap. The lack of inclusion of children of exposed on our examination list has been the cause of considerable unrest among the exposed people. Enclosures 1 and 2 present the ERDA stand on this issue.

(on back)

Communication Difficulties:

Over the years attempts have been made at village meetings to explain in a straightforward manner the need for the examinations and the significance of findings. However the language barrier and uncertainty of translation have always imposed serious difficulties in this regard. BNL with the Trust Territory published an illustrated booklet in Marshallese answering questions posed by the exposed people about radiation effects. The people have never really understood or appreciated the importance of annual medical examinations and therefore there has been some unrest concerning the need for such examinations in view of statements about the lack of findings. It was explained that the examinations were a safeguard to their health and that though radiation effects were not expected to be seen from such low doses, experience in human beings was too limited to be certain of this. In spite of this, rapport with the people was excellent and there was full cooperation in the examinations.

Developments leading to the present crisis:

Initial compensation of Rongelap people; "inconvenience payment" of Utirik people:

In 1965 the exposed Rongelap people received about 11,000 dollars each as compensation for radiation effects. This caused further unrest among the Utirik people who felt that even though they had no radiation effects they should be compensated to some extent. Perhaps there was some resentment among the people against the medical team for this though it was explained that the BNL doctors did not formulate the compensation bills. There was sympathy for the Utirik people's feelings and later the AEC and the Department of Interior granted the Utirik people a token payment (slightly over \$100 per person) not for radiation effects but based on inconvenience to the people imposed as a result of the fallout.

Political interference:

About 5 years ago a Marshallese congressman attacked the United States and the medical team with absurd charges concerning the exposed Marshallese and medical examinations and in 1971 he invited a Japanese "medical team" to the Marshalls to check-up on our examinations. The team was composed of largely reporters with one Japanese woman doctor. The attempt was thwarted by the High Commissioner because of inadequate credentials of the group. This infuriated the politicians who caused our March 1972 examinations of the Rongelap and Utirik people to be aborted. A special committee on Rongelap and Utirik was formed by the Congress of Micronesia who organized a medical observer group in 1972, referred to at the beginning. The committee published a sizeable book covering our examinations and the observers report, the results of which were generally favorable to us and did much, at least, temporarily, to quiet the unrest.

Congress of Micronesia bills and TTPI - ERDA agreement:

During the past few years two bills were formulated at the instigation of the Congress of Micronesia 1) A hospital benefit bill (Public Law 5-52) to allow for free hospitalization, transportation and per diem for exposed Rongelap and Utirik patients and included the control group of unexposed Rongelap people who are on 742 examination list. This has been the cause of further unrest, which no doubt plays a strong role in the present crisis, particularly in Utirik. The complaints associated with this law largely concerns the fact that the Utirik people feel that there should be a control group for their population. The unexposed Utirik people are not entitled to the benefits of the bill as are the Rongelap control population. Also the Rongelap and Utirik people as pointed out above feel that the children of exposed parents

(in brief)

should be included. There was extensive discussion of these points at the March 1976 survey and it had been hoped that the issues had been satisfactorily

explained. A letter was written to the Marshallese congressman (Mr. Balos) about these grievances, and explained the situation (copy enclosure 3). In spite of the above complaints the people on Utirik and Rongelap during the March visit were most friendly. 2) A second Law (now before our Congress) concerns further compensation for the exposed Marshallese for radiation effects, particularly thyroid surgical cases. Enclosure 4 presents the status of the bill.

Development of thyroid tumors in the Utirik population:

Culmination of the unrest was related to the development of the thyroid effects on the Utirik people. When, in 1969, a thyroid cancer was discovered in a Utirik woman its relation to radiation exposure was considered to be unlikely particularly since the thyroid tumor incidence was generally not increased in this exposed population. The people were so informed. In 1975 a second thyroid cancer was surgically removed from a Utirik woman and it became apparent that perhaps, indeed, radiation exposure was playing a role. This possibility was confirmed by statistical experts. ERDA, the Department of Interior and the Congress of Micronesia were informed about this and it was recommended that the Utirik thyroid surgical cases be included in the compensation bill then being formulated. Between the March meeting and the June 1976 quarterly trip of the BNL resident physician a third case of thyroid cancer in a Utirik woman was operated upon and returned to Utirik at the time of the June trip. A letter to the spouse of this patient explained her condition and that her name was being submitted to the Department of Interior for consideration for compensation purposes. This third case of cancer of the thyroid makes the risk per rad for thyroid cancer in the Utirik population

considerably higher than in the Rongelap population. Puzzling also is the fact that if the cancer cases are subtracted from the total thyroid tumor incidence in the exposed Utirik people the benign lesions are no more numerous than found in the unexposed Marshallese populations. It is clear that the occurrence of 3 thyroid cancer cases in the Utirik population (which at that time equaled the Rongelap exposed incidence) caused the Utirik people to believe that their exposure had been greater than they had been led them to believe. This probably helped precipitate the letter of grievances submitted by the Utirik people.

The people's reaction toward the team leader is understandable to some extent, but their remarks about Dr. Knudsen are completely unjustified. Dr. Knudsen is an excellent physician, has been dedicated to the health care of the Marshallese and has been well liked and respected by the people.

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Enclosures