

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

Marshall Islands

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DATE:

May 18, 1955

SUBJECT:

Return of Inhabitants to Rongelap Atoll in the TTPI

PARTICIPANTS:

Dept. of Interior - Mr. Arnold, Deputy Director Office of Territories
 Mr. Yeomans
 A.E.C. - Dr. Dunham, Deputy Director, Division of Biology and Medicine

COPIES TO:

Dept. of State - Mr. Cramer
 ODA - Mr. Gerig
 S/AE - Mr. Mulcahey
 - Mr. Spiegel ✓

SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE SECRETARY
S/AE

MAY 19 1955

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Mr. Arnold explained that Mr. Mucker, Deputy High Commissioner of TTPI, had decided that it would be unwise at this time to return the inhabitants of Rongelap to their atoll. This decision was made on the basis of information furnished him by the AEC after a March medical survey of the Rongelapese and a radiation survey of the atoll itself. These surveys disclosed that the northern islands of the Atoll would still be dangerous to the inhabitants, as would the shell fish in the lagoon. Mr. Mucker was not prepared to take the responsibility for returning the people to the Atoll under these circumstances as it would be practically impossible to insure that there would be 100% conformity with safety requirements.

The Department of the Interior, Mr. Arnold explained, would not reverse the decision of the Deputy High Commissioner and felt that they must abide by his on the scene decision.

Dr. Dunham confirmed the information as to the condition of the people and the atoll. As to the future, he said the AEC would send a survey team to the area again in September; but at present it appeared that it would be another year before it would be completely safe for the people to return. He mentioned incidentally that one of the problems of the Administration was the apparent development of indolence on the part of the Rongelapese living on ~~the atoll~~. The AEC had furnished them with 1000 chickens and enough hogs for breeding purposes but the people had proceeded to eat up all the livestock. They also are not doing any fishing to help provide for their own food requirements, thus they are complete charity cases.

I explained that from the point of view of U.S. relations in the Trusteeship Council, it would be best if the people could be returned to their island before the summer session of the Council; but that of course the primary consideration should be the welfare of the people involved. The next best thing to do was simply to present the facts to the Council so they would understand the reasons for the delay.

ID:ODA:DW:Cramer:cm 5/19/55

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