

U.S. urged to apologize for nuke tests on Marshall Islands 60 years later

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Washington, January 12 (RHC)-- Hundreds of arms control, environmental and other activist groups have called on the U.S. to formally apologize to the Marshall Islands for the impact of extensive nuclear testing there in the 1940s and 50s and to pay fair compensation to its residents.

The activists, led by Greenpeace, Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Marshallese Education Initiative, made the request in a recent letter to U.S. President Joe Biden. The statement asked Washington to fulfill its nuclear justice promises in the ongoing negotiations with the Marshall Islands on the renewal of a Compact of Free Association (COFA), which has been the basis of relations with the Pacific region since the 1980s.

The COFA provisions expire in 2023 for the Marshall Islands and other Pacific territories, the Federated States of Micronesia, and with Palau in 2024.

The island nations continue to enjoy close ties with Washington, but analysts warn failure to reach new terms for economic aid could prompt them to turn to strategic US rival China for financing or to boost trade and tourism.

Residents of the Marshall Islands still grapple with the health and environmental effects of the 67 U.S. nuclear bomb tests there from 1946 to 1958, including "Castle Bravo" on Bikini Atoll in 1945—the largest U.S. bomb ever detonated.

In addition to issuing a formal apology and addressing compensation claims, they said, the United States should take long-term environmental remediation, expand access to health care, not least for illnesses related to radiation exposure, and declassify documents related to nuclear tests.

Separately, the State Department said on Tuesday the United States had signed a memorandum of understanding with Palau as part of the COFA negotiations, emphasizing a close and continued partnership "and reflecting our consensus reached on levels and kinds of future U.S. assistance to be requested for Palau's economic development."

The United States has left piles of nuclear waste on the island, which is the result of the Cold War nuclear testing program. U.S. officials later cleaned up contaminated soil on Enewetak Island, where the U.S. not only detonated the bulk of its weapons tests, but also conducted dozens of biological weapons tests and evacuated 130 tons of soil from the Nevada radiation test.

Now the cement coffin, which the locals call the "Tomb," is in danger of collapsing due to rising seas and other effects of climate change. The tides rise from its sides and rise every year as the distant glaciers melt and the ocean waters rise.

For many in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Runit Dome is the most visible manifestation of the United States' nuclear legacy, a symbol of the United States' unfulfilled promises in the region.

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