

First ever nuclear legacy conference

Following the traditional annual program commemorating Nuclear Victims Remembrance Day at the Meto Court area in front of the capitol building Wednesday morning, the RMI's first ever nuclear legacy conference opened in the afternoon at the International Conference Center. The theme for the conference was "Charting a Journey Toward Justice."

After an invocation by the Reverend Enja Enos, Minister of Foreign Affairs John Silk gave welcoming remarks during which he explained that his involvement in dealing with the nuclear legacy began in the 1980s when he worked for Micronesia Legal Services Corporation assisting the people of Enewetak when they were moved back to their atoll from Ujelang.

He said that his experiences at that time taught him that the nuclear weapons testing program had "forever altered our culture."

Minister Silk shared a personal perspective on the effects of the weapons testing that he has through his grandchildren. Five of them are descendants of the group of Bikinians originally removed from their atoll in 1946 and two are part Enewetakese. He described all of them as "children of the 21st century who are also orphans of the 20th century" and said the fact that they cannot return and live on all of the islands in their atolls "is testimony to the fact that the nuclear legacy is intergenerational for the Marshalllese people."

The keynote address for the conference was delivered by Ambassador Tony deBrum who praised the "very courageous message" delivered by President Hilda Heine in her speech during the morning program and added that Minister Silk's remarks "punctuated what needed to be said about what we are doing here this week."

Ambassador deBrum then called on one of his "closest advisors" to "add a little bit of flavor to the session" and introduced his grandson "Ton-Ton" to tell a story about one person's experience during the March 1, 1954 Bravo thermonuclear detonation.

A central theme of Ambassador deBrum's address dealt with access to information about the nuclear weapons testing program. He said "Information must be made available in a free and open manner so the people of these islands can say that we have made an informed choice. The choice to sign the 177 agreement was based on faulty, sometimes outright duplicitous, information. We have repeated this 100 times but I will not ever get tired of saying it: There



Minister Amenta Matthew, Chief Secretary Justina Langidrik, and US Ambassador Karen Stewart at the ICC last week. Photo: Hilary Hosia.

Message to Forum

Marshall Islands Embassy to Fiji Charge Albon Ishoda delivered a message to Forum Secretariat staff last week, highlighting the issues around nuclear justice recognition of the 63rd anniversary of the Bravo hydrogen bomb test at Bikini. He pointed out "nuclear justice" was not entirely a Marshall Islands issue, but one that required the Pacific region's collective advocacy and championing. Pacific Islands Forum Secretary General, Dame Meg Taylor also released a statement for March 1 on the website www.forumsec.org/pages.cfm/newsroom/speeches

Nuclear testing program 'forever altered our culture'

Explosive film festival enralls the crowds

Adding to this year's observance of Nuclear Victims Remembrance Day, a small film festival was held during three nights last week at the Sgt. Sam Sports Center on the campus of the College of the Marshall Islands. The festival featured free public screenings of several films related to the nuclear weapons testing program in the Marshall Islands and its lasting effects.

Local filmmaker Jack Niedenthal introduced three films about Bikini on Wednesday evening, including his Microwave Films production of Ainikien Jidjid ilo Boñ. Courtesy of producer and director Fabienne Lips-Dumas of Red Letter Films, the first public screening in the Marshall Islands of the film Children of Armageddon took place Thursday evening.

And two other Marshall Islands premieres were introduced by their producers/directors during the Friday night finalé. Yokwe Films co-founders Céline Lemaire and Fanny Moulin appeared by videolink from France to preview their 26-minute documentary Bravo, la bombé and Masako Sakato traveled from Japan to be here in person to show her full-length feature Journey Without End.

Organizers of the festival have expressed interest in having another one next year.

The audience was enthralled by the unique and fascinating stories of Rev. Enos, Honorary Consul Charles Domnick, former Senator Jeban Riklōñ, and former Bikini Mayor Alson Kelen. A series of presentations by various experts who traveled from outside the RMI to participate in the conference began during the Wednesday afternoon session, continued all day Thursday and for most of Friday morning. Topics included a summary of legal actions brought by Marshall Islanders seeking redress for various damages from the weapons testing, a review of health consequences from the testing, the history of human radiation research, and recent radiation measurements at the atolls of Enewetak, Bikini, and Rongelap.

Other presentations covered a history of the nuclear testing program, contradictions in policy and practice surrounding the program, and an analysis of the "invisible nuclear catastrophe" experienced by the people of Ailuk atoll. The process to preserve and archive the extensive records of the Nuclear Claims Tribunal, the worldwide

threats of nuclear weapons and climate change, and how creativity and artistic responses can lead to social justice were also discussed by visiting presenters.

A second panel discussion was held on Thursday afternoon with Speaker and Rongelap Senator Kenneth Kedi, Enewetak Senator Jack Ading, Bikini Senator Eldon Note, and Utrok Mayor John Kaiko sharing many frank and insightful observations about the ongoing effects and issues which the people and communities of those four atolls continue to experience.

The final presentation of the program featured a video link with an historian of nuclear science who has created a searchable database of more than 13,000 documents related to the RMI by the US Department of Energy from the mid-1990s to 2005 and the database was launched online during the conference in order to make those documents accessible to the public. The website is <http://data.nuclearsecrecy.com>.

After its conclusion, Minister Silk commented that "Through the conference, we are kick-starting the effort to address the nuclear legacy after necessarily having had to focus on other issues such as climate change in recent years."

President Heine remarked that "The RMI has been campaigning in the fight against nuclear weapons and climate change, issues that are of utmost importance, in particular when we consider our fragile environmental conditions as a small atoll nation. These are issues that threaten international peace and security as we know it. Our first-ever nuclear legacy conference energized and empowered many people, particularly the younger generations who are our upcoming leaders and advocates who will carry on the torch towards our journey towards justice."

All of the conference sessions were video-recorded and it is intended that they will be made available for viewing both through NTA's television service and online in the future.

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concludes annual commemoration

Strong stories help build the big picture

HILARY HOSIA

Of all the dignitaries attending the first Nuclear Legacy Conference at the International Conference Center last week, including related activities held outside the ICC, the US Ambassador to the Marshall Islands Karen Stewart likely holds the record for attending all the conference events and for staying throughout the duration of each program.

Other notable people at the conference included the following:

Tony "Ton-Ton" deBrum Kattil

The youngest participant in the summit was 8-year old Tony "Ton-Ton" deBrum Kattil, who is related to both Tony deBrum and Charlie Domnick. The third grader brought laughter to the audience with this story: "When jimma (grandfather) Charlie was a small boy in Likep, he didn't want to gather the leaves, as was the chore in those days. But when the bomb went off, jimma Charlie ran out of the house with no clothes on."

Following young Tony's speech, Charles Domnick added: "No one in the world has been exposed twice," again the audience lit up in laughter as they pictured the scene.

Climate Change Ambassador Tony deBrum, Keynote Address

"We don't dwell in the past. The Marshalllese outrigger canoe does not have a rearview mirror. It's like when you go fishing and you're in the middle of the school and tuna is jumping. And you're still trying to get your lines and your bait and your lures ready. They (tuna) will not wait for you to put your line together."

Things that had happened to us has happened already, and there can be no more waiting time. We need to create a solution at our own pace with the knowledge that we have.

We need to have our advisors, our scientists and our council inspect and advise the government to take a proper step forward."

University of Columbia Professor Emlyn Hughes on Radiation Measurements in the Northern Marshall Islands

University of Columbia Professor Emlyn Hughes started his presentation with a picture of his five-year old son followed by a question to the audience, "would I take my five-year old son to live on that island?" "I leave you guys to answer that," he said.

Hughes based his presentation on scientific findings acquired during his "gamma radiation measurement trip" in 2015 on Bikini, Enewetak and Rongelap, during which Hughes and students from Columbia University, using state-of-the-art equipment that you



Clockwise from left are Nuclear Legacy Conference speakers Tony 'Ton-Ton' deBrum Kattil, Dr. Neal Palafox, Tony deBrum, Bill Graham, Kenneth Kedi, Glenn Alcalay, Trudy Peterson, and Emlyn Hughes. Photos: Hilary Hosia.

would find in the US or Europe, found radiation measurement that conflict with those of the US Department of Energy. "Our measurements disagree with DOE on some levels," Hughes said. "Take Bikini for example. DOE use measurements collected from long time ago and use them as current readings. It is important to have independent groups to conduct similar studies because DOE, like every other government agency, have their own agendas."

Dr. Neal Palafox on the Health Consequences of Nuclear Weapons Testing in the RMI

Dr. Neal Palafox, urges the younger generation to understand and decipher the many forms of cancers to know and differentiate which ones originated from nuclear testing when seeking medical help. "I'm talking to the young people. You have to understand this stuff if you want to seek justice. You will lose a dialogue with scientists if you say nuclear testing caused your cancer. You should start your dialogue with something like this: I know the statistics and I understand there is a probable cause that you are responsible for a small percentage for me being sick, therefore you

owe me health care."

Professor Glenn Alcalay on A History of Nuclear Weapons Testing Program in the RMI

"Several weathermen were stationed on Rongerik to monitor the weather every hour around the hour for three months — they constantly sent weather balloons to monitor the weather and then report to Kwajalein.

Until this day, the US called the shift of winds an "accident." After 40 years of working here in the Marshall Islands, I contend that it was no accident!

Enewetak and Ujelang Senator Jack Ading

Despite the harsh treatment done to his people in 1947, one that ultimately led to the demise of both his parents, Enewetak Senator Jack Ading expressed his gratitude to US for the many developments on Enewetak and the ongoing food supplement program that continues to benefit his people. "Of the 67 bombs dropped in the Marshall Islands, 43 were detonated at Enewetak. One can imagine what those 43 bombs could do to a tiny island. The US promised to treat us as their own when they moved us. That promise was never fulfilled. When we relocated, starvation was the norm. We couldn't trade because we relied on the coconut to eat. At times, we competed with the rats

with the coconuts.

"If the US can spend billions of dollars on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, why can't DOE spend \$10,000 for a fence to prevent locals from entering the Runit Dome?"

Utrok Mayor John Kaiko

"In the aftermath of the bombs, people were advised not to eat too much local food. Imported food was introduced and the food supplement created a problem. Today Utrok has the largest number of diabetes in the RMI."

Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner on being called a nuclear survivor

During Q&A Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner asked the following question to the Four Atoll panel: How comfortable are you when you hear other Marshalllese say they are nuclear survivors?

Speaker Kedi answered: "New findings show the fallout covered the entire country."

Moderator Bill Graham praising the commitment of Archivist Trudy Peterson

"This is her seventh trip to the RMI since 2012 to coordinate the organization and digitization of the Tribunal's records and we have never paid her even one dollar for her valuable time and expertise in that effort."