

Ms. Chiyoko Tamayose's Testimony

Hearing on the Changed Circumstances Petition (CCP) US Congress House Joint Hearings Resources Committee and Foreign Affairs Pacific Area.

May 25, 2005

My name is Chiyoko Tamayose. I was born May 2, 1937. I am from Rongelap atoll in the Marshall Islands. I returned to Rongelap in 1957, three years after the nuclear fallout contaminated my homeland & at the time when scientists informed us that the land was clean and safe to go back home. I noticed that not everything was right in 1957. The arrowroots that before grew everywhere were gone. The coconut trees were bearing green and yellow nuts from the same tree; very unusual. The water changed color when we cooked our foods; we tried to change the water many times, but the same thing kept happening. On occasion, we found some of our fish had thyroid problems. Small hardened nodules were found in the fish gills; these were very hard to crack; but after opening them up & tossed in the water; the water changed to the colors of a rainbow.

Because we did not understand the reason for the change in the water; we played & splashed in it. We were only instructed not to eat the coconut crabs which were plentiful in Rongelap, but during the times when there was a shortage of food we ate these delicacies. As we ate other locally grown food, we developed blisters all over our mouths, but we continued to eat them because we were hungry. Later on, we were told that it was alright to eat the coconut crabs – meaning that all locally available food was safe to consume. I became very sick with the convulsion, and at the more severe times my family thought I was dead. When I came through, I saw they were crying by my side. I could not bear to be in bright daylight. All the windows and doors of my house were kept shut.

The Department of Energy officials sent me to New York for treatment. There's this machine (I do not know what it was called) that they put me inside. I could not remain in it any second longer because my body felt like it was on fire and pierced by a thousands fine needles. I was told that the radiation content in my body was higher than some of the survivors of 1954 fallout in Rongelap. I had my thyroid surgery at a hospital in Cleveland and was informed that there were three more thyroids to remove later on. I was given so many kind of medication as treatment. I did not want to take so many pills; I was a grown woman, but crying unashamedly because I was afraid to take those medication. I was one of the people who were secretly given injection for unknown reasons.

The DOE doctors assigned us numbers; we were referred to only in numbers and as the 'Control Group'. I believe this program was called 'Project 4.1' It was the people who were not exposed to nuclear fallout, but became exposed and sick from the injections that doctor gave us without our consent and from eating food crops that were grown in the contaminated soil. I watched the doctors drew blood from my vein, mixed it in some type of solution before returning it again to my body. Sometime this procedure was repeated 3 or 4 times in one sitting. I was frightened to see so much blood taken

from me, but I patiently allowed that to happen. I trusted the American doctors to treat me fairly and take good care of my illness, rather than using me as guinea pig as I later on learned.

In 1992 when the DOE official documents were declassified and made available to the public, I received a letter to inform me that the injections that I previously received were routine tests. I do not believe that. I have 12 children and some of them are physically handicapped. I believe in my heart that their problems began with me. I have one son that had liver cancer; he was operated on at the Kuakini Hospital in Honolulu and he died during the operation. He left a family of 4 children and a wife. Another son had problems with his thyroid – so severe that he could not eat nor swallow water. A daughter was born with the lower body so soft as if there was no bone. I have a 40 year old son who was born with a good size blister on his back. Two weeks later we were sent to the Naval Hospital in Guam for surgery. The doctors informed that they'd never seen that type of case before. He became paralyzed; he crawls around the house, he helps me prepare meals when I am tired; he changes his own pampers. He's a great son, but very heart-breaking for a mother to see in that condition. These are cases involving my immediate family. There are numerous cases in Rongelap that have not been reported or heard by many people or doctors. One of my cousins, gave birth to what is known these days as jelly fish baby; another one of her babies was born without any back bone. These are unusual cases that never happened to us before.

I am asking you to come to the Marshall Islands and listen to the survivors' stories. Hold hearings in the Marshall Islands and in Hawaii where many survivors reside now in order to be closer to the hospitals. My voice is one of the survivors. There are hundreds of cases that you must hear as you deliberate on the Changed Circumstances Petition. The Changed Circumstances Petition is critical because if it is not approved by Congress that means all the survivors and their affected descendants are left to fend for themselves – which means either stay at home and receive minimal health care or travel off island to receive treatment. There will be no funds to treat their health condition. That is not so attractive an idea for those who can not afford to travel. If the Petition is not approved, that means Congress is washing its hands off its moral obligation to care for the problems that it created.

Today, I am 68 years of age - more than half of my life I've lived with many types of health problems such as thyroid. I believe the health problems that we in the Marshall Island have now will continue beyond my time. Your support is critical for as long as these problems that derived from the nuclear testing program exist. Thank you.