

**Remarks of Minister Gerald Zackios**  
**RMI-DOE annual meeting, June 13-14, 2001. Honolulu, Hawaii.**

Deputy Assistant Secretary Geoffrey Judge and colleagues from the Department of Energy, Mr. Joseph McDermott, Senators, Mayors, ladies and gentlemen:

It is a privilege to be with all of you today. I consider this meeting between the RMI Government and the Department of Energy to be one of the most important bilateral dialogues between our nations. As we all know, we share a unique responsibility to assist communities in the RMI with their efforts to address their radiological and other problems.

Because this is the first RMI-DOE meeting I have participated in, I reviewed the files from previous years to get a sense of what is discussed at these meetings and what progress has been achieved. It is clear to me that although we have many challenges that still need to be addressed, we have made significant improvements in the way we work together, and in our efforts to consider the best interests of the atoll communities.

I see this progress most notably in the joint communiques that have been signed over the past few years. The joint communiques capture the points we agree upon at the end of our yearly meetings, and they provide us with an agreed approach to our work for the coming year. Therefore, I look forward to securing another joint communique from this year's meeting and hope we can set that as a first goal for this meeting.

In terms of the substance for this year's meeting, our agenda is quite full and I'm certain we'll have lots of active discussion during the next two days. From the perspective of the RMI national government, I would like to see us to pay particular attention to the following issues:

1. Environmental program. DOE's environmental program has done a very good job of collecting data from many of the affected atolls. From what I understand, based on the work of scientists from LLNL as well as our own scientists, we now have a pretty good understanding of the lingering radiation levels on some atoll environments. Recently, scientists working for the Nuclear Claims Tribunal collected data from Ailuk Atoll indicating that the radiation level is above the 15 mrem standard set by the Tribunal. The RMI Government requests that DOE extend its whole body counting program to Ailuk and any other atolls with residual contamination above 15 mrems.

Now that we now have good data regarding the environment, it is time to shift to the next phase of our work. We must shift from collecting data to helping communities address their environmental problems in the manner the communities find most appropriate.

I would like us to leave here tomorrow with a plan for how and when we will design the next phase of the environmental program. The new program should meet the

same obligations as clean-up programs in communities in the United States, including community participation and a holistic approach to environmental recovery. It is also critical for the RMI and DOE to come up with a plan for addressing all of the environmental problems caused by the testing program, not just the radiological problems. For example, our environmental restoration efforts have to include the removal of tracer chemicals used in the weapons tests, as well as biological agents used in the rocket and missile tests on Enewetak Atoll. We also want to work with DOE, other US Government agencies, and the Congress to determine who is responsible for monitoring the integrity of the Runit Dome: this is one of the gaps identified at last year's meeting that we still have not resolved.

I would like to propose that we include a brainstorming session in our discussion of the environmental program. The purpose of the brainstorming session would be to allow the atoll representatives, with input from the scientists, to define the elements of the comprehensive environmental program they would like to see in the future.

2. Medical program. Again, in reviewing the files from previous meetings I can see that the RMI and DOE have made great attempts to try to improve the medical program. At the request of the recipient atolls, the program was shifted from a medical research program conducted by a weapons laboratory to a medical care program administered by PHRI.

I understand that the recipient communities have some concerns about the existing medical program. The major complaint I'm hearing is that patients do not like working with rotating doctors and residents. I think no one in this room - or anywhere in the world, for that matter - can argue that the people exposed to acute levels of radiation from Bravo deserve the very best level of medical care in the world. You'll have to excuse my frankness in saying this, but the patients are not receiving the best possible care. This may be due to budgetary or other problems, but the bottom line is that this population should never have any complaints about their medical care.

The first requirement for improving the medical program will be the assigning of a full-time doctor to reside in the Marshall Islands and care for the population. Caring for these patients is not a time to train resident doctors, it is the time to provide a highly qualified, experienced doctor to live with and care for these people. The RMI Government will not accept anything less.

3. Documents. While DOE has done an admirable job of locating many of the documents pertaining to the testing era, there are many more documents that the RMI has not received. Fallout information about entire test series is still missing. The RMI cannot fully understand the impacts of the testing program until it has all information about the subject. We rely on you to locate and provide documents to us in both hard copy and CD-roms. The RMI has raised this point with DOE at several meetings. I would be interested in hearing a timeframe for when the RMI can expect to receive remaining documents, particularly those pertaining to fallout patterns.

4. Workers. Prior to his departure, the RMI worked closely with information Dr. Paul Seligman regarding the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act of 2000. I would appreciate it if DOE could provide the RMI with a contact person in DOE for questions and issues related to the program. I also would appreciate it if you could find out if Marshallese workers who are currently working in contaminated areas will be eligible to participate in the program if they become ill as a result of their employment.
5. Changed circumstances. The RMI included the topic of changed circumstances on the agenda so we can brief you about the contents of our petition to Congress. I understand that DOE has a limited mandate from Congress, and therefore, you do not have the mandate to provide the services required to assist with many of the radiological problems in the RMI. Yet, the RMI hopes that DOE will understand the importance of broadening US assistance for problems related to the testing program, and to assist the individuals and communities who have been damaged or injured by the testing program. In this regard, I believe the changed circumstances petition is in both RMI and DOE's best interest if it is successful in providing additional assistance for radiation related matters. After listening to our presentation, I would appreciate hearing feedback from you, as well as any suggestions or advice you may have on how the RMI should advance the petition with the US Government.
6. Scientific dialogue. I would like to take advantage of the presence of our scientific experts from LLNL and SC&A to propose a scientists' lunch during today's lunch break. It is rare for people with so much experience and knowledge about radiological conditions in the RMI to be in the same place, and at the same time. Therefore, I would appreciate it very much if our scientists could get together, discuss some of the more recent data analysis and activities, and report back to the group about areas where the scientists agree, disagree, or came up with ideas for how to approach future problems. The reason I'm proposing that the scientists get together and do this over lunch is because the rest of us laypeople will have no idea what they're talking about anyway!
7. Request for Secretary Abraham to visit the islands. Finally, I would like to make a formal invitation to Secretary Abraham to visit the islands, and in particular the affected atolls. I signed a letter of invitation to Secretary Abraham that I will turn over to you in hopes that you will hand carry it back to Washington, D.C. I think it would greatly help our joint efforts if the Secretary could get a first-hand appreciation for the unique radiological issues that the RMI experiences.

Before I conclude I just want to remind us all that we have come together to discuss extremely sensitive, and often difficult issues. We all know that the testing program caused great injury and damage to people and environments in the RMI. We all know that individuals and communities are in great need of assistance to respond to their problems. While DOE's mandate from Congress may be limited, we need to work together to ensure that we jointly address every possible problem that we can. To do so,

it is important that we speak cordially to one another, respect each other - even when we disagree - but most importantly, that we don't lose sight of our focus. The focus of these meetings has to be doing everything in our power to improve the lives and conditions for the people and communities that have endured great suffering as a result of the testing programs, and our **sacrafices** for world peace.

I look forward to a productive meeting and to working with all of you over the next two days. Thank you.