**FREE ASSOCIATION- a unique political arrangement**

What is Free association?

The Compact of Free Association is an international treaty that governs bilateral relations between the United States and the Republic of the Marshall Islands. Free association is an agreement between an island and a bigger country. The bigger country defends it, gives it money, and helps take care of its political/economic negotiations with other countries in exchange for having military facilities on the island.

In 2003, the Marshall Islands renewed its free association compact with the USA. Under the compact, the U.S. government provides guaranteed financial assistance for a 20 -year period in exchange for full international defense authority and responsibilities including land for US military bases, missile ranges, and NASA space program facilities.

**Is it good or bad?**

In 1986, the United States entered into Free Association with the Marshall Islands. Under Free Association, the U.S. will provide the Marshall Islands with $62.7 million from 2013 through 2023. The United States Army maintains its Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on Kwajalein Atoll. The agreement allows the United States continued use of the U.S. Army Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA) missile test range until 2066.

In addition the money the USA gives is used for roads, education, and businesses. Also the USA buys products made in the Marshall Islands and this support the Marshall Islands’ economy. Lastly, Marshallese have visa-free travel rights to move to the USA to find jobs and attend American colleges and universities

**What about the nuclear testing from the past?**

Unfortunately, the people of the Marshall Islands had their homeland and health sacrificed for the national security interests of the United States. From 1946 to 1958, the United States conducted 67 nuclear tests in the Marshall Islands. The most severe impacts were visited upon the people of the Rongelap Atoll in 1954 following a very large thermonuclear explosion which deposited life-threatening quantities of radioactive fallout on their homeland. Many suffered from tissue destructive effects, such as burns, and subsequently from latent radiation-induced diseases such as cancer.

The human costs of nuclear testing in RMI (the Republic of Marshall Islands) was not limited to those who were alive during the tests. From 1946 until the 1990’s Marshallese suffered side effects due to the island’s radiation exposure.

Three side–effects of nuclear testing in Marshall Islands were birth defects, cancer, and thyroid disorders.

A NCI (National Cancer Institute) study discovered that 170 excess cancers occurred among Marshallese as a result of the testing. In addition, the NCI concluded that RMI suffered a 9 percent increase in cancers as a result of nuclear testing in the Pacific.

**What can you do?**

America’s testing of weapons not only compromised the health and well-being of Marshallese citizens it also destroyed some of the most beautiful landscapes in Oceania. Islands, reefs, atolls, and sea life were all destroyed in the name of scientific research. Today, the following countries have not committed to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty: China, Egypt, Iran, Israel, the United States, India, North Korea and Pakistan. Please support the Nuclear-test ban and always remember how the Marshallese people sacrificed their lives, homes, and land during the COLD WAR (1947-1991) in an effort to give us all world peace.