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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by the International Women's Anthropology Conference (IWAC), a non-governmental organization on the roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[24 August 2012]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

Addressing the toxic legacy from U.S. nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands requires remediation and restoration of both human and environmental systems**

First of all, deepest appreciation to Special Rapporteur Georgescu for his report on the environment, health and human rights problems resulting from nuclear weapons testing the Marshall Islands, and for his thoughtful recommendations to the Republic of the Marshall Islands, the United States, and the international community on ways to support the Marshallese people in their struggle to restore a healthy environment and fundamental human rights. As a delegate from the International Women's Anthropology Conference it is an honour to offer these comments.

Between 1946 and 1958 the United States tested 67 nuclear weapons on or near Bikini and Enewetak atolls, atomizing entire islands and, in at least 20 of these tests, blanketing the entire Marshallese nation with measurable levels of radioactive fallout. This nuclear militarism has profoundly altered the terrestrial and marine environment and the health and way of life of the Marshallese nation. Exposure to environmental hazards that humans cannot see, feel or smell not only causes injury and degenerative change in biological systems, such conditions warp the very fabric of society, undermining individual, family, and societal health and the social and cultural systems that traditionally sustain that health.

Nuclear contamination of home islands has disenfranchised and transformed entire communities. Nuclear nomads face bleak economic opportunities as they lack the right to basic resources, such as the food that grows on trees, when they reside on someone else's land. And challenges are multiplied when families migrate to secure medical treatment.

For Marshallese elders, radiation has attenuated their role in society, undermining the value of the traditional knowledge passed to them by previous generations. When communities cannot live on their home islands, knowledge and stewardship customs become increasingly irrelevant to daily life, and the respect accorded to elders, the keepers of such knowledge, diminishes. For Marshallese men, the traditional food provider for their families, self-worth is challenged when men lack opportunities to fish or gather food, and lack the skills and education to provide for their families in diaspora. Marshallese women have suffered, and continue to suffer from the effects of radiation exposure in unique ways. Stillbirths, miscarriages, the inability to conceive, and gross deformities in offspring are rampant in the Marshall Islands, particularly in communities exposed to large doses of radiation. Marshallese women developed new words to describe their reproductive failures, words they did not need before the testing program. Many Marshallese women face stigmas and fears about marriage or reproduction because of concern that the radiation will continue to compromise successive generations. For the youth, who are second, third, and now fourth generation nuclear survivors, the challenges are complex as traditional means to sustain life and livelihood erode, while the challenges of life in a radioactive nation demand and drive innovative change.

Societal challenges are further tested by the inequities resulting from a history of nuclear colonialism, where access to information has been restricted, scientific research about the effects of radiation reflect military priorities, and remediation efforts rarely reflect the standards employed in the United States.

** The Center for Political Ecology, an NGO without consultative status, also shares the views expressed in this statement.

With independence, the Marshall Islands government inherited a grossly inadequate health system. Many Marshallese people experienced fallout from one or more nuclear weapons tests, yet only those people exposed to one detonation, the March 1, 1954 “Bravo test” of a thermonuclear hydrogen bomb, are eligible for United States-funded medical treatment when radiogenic disease occurs. Marshallese were not only exposed to radiation at the time of the detonations, nationwide deposition and bioaccumulation in the marine and terrestrial food chain means that people were, and are, chronically exposed to radiation and other toxic contaminants. Yet, while chronic exposure to nuclear waste and other environmental hazards generates cumulative and synergistic effects, especially cancer, there is no oncologist in the Marshall Islands, nor is there a cancer treatment facility. Chemotherapy is not an option in the Marshall Islands. Medical migration is the norm.

Given these conditions and constraints, we welcome the attention of the Special Rapporteur for Toxic Waste and Human Rights and endorse his recommendations. We ask that this Council take aggressive action on the Special Rapporteur’s recommendations, keeping in mind that as an indigenous nation with thousands of years of experience surviving and thriving in a Pacific atoll realm, the Marshallese are the best scientists when it comes to observing, documenting and understand environmental conditions and change. To achieve a restoration of a sustainable way of life, the Marshallese must be determinant actors with full access to information and the economic, social, and technical means to apply that knowledge in scientific research and remediation endeavor.
