

STATEMENT OF
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MAYOR, KILI/BIKINI/EJIT LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BEFORE THE
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

REGARDING S. 2182
TO PROVIDE FOR THE RESETTLEMENT AND RELOCATION OF THE PEOPLE OF
BIKINI

FEBRUARY 6, 2018
RM. 366, SENATE DIRKSEN BUILDING, 10:00A.M.

Madame Chair, Ranking Member Senator Maria Cantwell, Senators,

I am Anderson Jibas, the Mayor of the Kili/Bikini/Ejit Local Government. Attending this hearing with me are seven members of the ten-member Executive Council of the Kili/Bikini/Ejit Local Government or “KBE” for short.

I normally live on the island of Kili, in the Marshall Islands, the island where the displaced population of Bikini Atoll moved to many years ago, after first being moved to Rongerik, then to Kwajalein, then to Kili and Ejit.

We are here today at the request of the committee to provide remarks about proposed Senate Bill 2182, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so.

First, I commend the Department of the Interior in general and the Office of the Solicitor of the Interior in particular in recognizing that the Department did not have any statutory mandate over the Kili/Bikini/Ejit Resettlement Trust Fund annual budget and expenditures. We fully support the November 16, 2017 letter from Doug Domenech to me.

For more than 30 years, the Department exercised oversight over every single expenditure from the Resettlement Trust Fund at the acquiescence of successive administrations of the Kili-Bikini-Ejit Local Government. Although we appreciated working with the Department during that time, that setup was condescending and very colonialist, so we very much appreciate the Department’s acting on its recognition of its limited role.

We have discovered that it is best for the KBE Council to deal directly with the Resettlement Trust Fund, because the way things were before, there were too many discrepancies and issues in dealing with two non-RMI natives who were, frankly, condescending to us. The Trust Liaison Agent and the lawyer in D.C. did not allow interaction between us and the Department, and many times we would

hear “DOI said NO” or DOI said this or that, but when we were finally able to check with DOI, DOI said they were never contacted. Power was in the hands of two men, one of whom, an ex-employee, is here testifying. Relationship now with the DOI is now direct, good, open, and transparent. The Council began dealing directly with DOI without these middle-men who scrambled our messages, and who did not really present or represent the real needs of the People of Bikini.

Our previous leaders put all their trust in these two men. I and the current Council have members who have spent many years in the United States, living and going to school, and the people elected us, not the former Trust Liaison Agent, who ran for Senator from Majuro Atoll, not Bikini Atoll, because they trust us.

The Kili/Bikini/Ejit local government and I are the elected leaders of the People of Bikini. We live with the People of Bikini and experience their daily joys and their daily hardships. We know best what is needed to make the lives of the displaced population more bearable. We feared DOI because our Liaison and Lawyer told us we were not allowed to interact with DOI. But things have changed, and we are moving forward.

When the Congressional Budget Office determined that the KBE Resettlement Trust Fund monies were not federal monies, but monies that belonged to the people of Bikini, I do not understand why the federal government continued to put restrictions on the use of money that was not federal money.

It was not until this past year that my administration asked the Department of the Interior that very question, which was answered favorably for the People of Bikini. That is, the Resettlement Trust Fund monies belong to the People of Bikini, and their elected leaders are best suited to determine how those monies are to be used.

Now, in retaliation against the Department of the Interior's recognition that the Department has no legal mandate to control the KBE Resettlement Trust Fund, this Committee has introduced this legislation which frankly takes us back to a colonialist and paternalistic system that says the bureaucrats in a Federal agency know what is best for the people of Bikini.

Madame Chair, we may look like simple folk whose recent ancestors were moved from Bikini to allow 23 thermonuclear blasts to poison all our islands and to vaporize three of our islands, but we simple folk have become more sophisticated and we know best what our people need; we know best how to provide for them now and in the future; we know how to survive the hardships of life on a rock in the middle of the Pacific, and we know the beauty of our islands in Bikini, where we long to live and to raise our children.

Back in 1988 we did not know how much it would cost to rehabilitate and to restore Bikini Atoll to a condition which permitted us to move back. The Resettlement Trust Fund was given about \$110 million. But in 2001, after scientists and engineers had completed their studies and developed a Rehabilitation and Restoration Plan, the scientists and engineers determined that the cost would be around \$361 million, of which about \$110 million was already “given” to the KBE Resettlement Trust Fund. An additional \$251 million was needed and was awarded by the Nuclear Claims Tribunal, but to date the U.S. Congress has refused to fund the award, and Bikini remains unsafe for habitation. Let me

repeat: Bikini already submitted a Rehabilitation and Restoration Plan in 2001, but the U.S. Congress ignored it, and now your committee is asking for another one. Are members of your committee ready to fund the 2001 Plan? If so, we are ready to move back as soon as the rehabilitation and restoration are finished.

In 2016, researchers from Columbia University went to Bikini and other atolls in the Marshall Islands and conducted surveys of the gamma ray emissions. The gamma radiation on Bikini was 184 milli-Rems per year, when the safe level is 15 milli-Rems per year. This was in 2016.

Be assured, we cannot move back with our families until the islands are cleaned up.

But we don't live in a fantasy world. When the U.S. told my ancestors that they would take care of us until we returned to our safe and clean land, Bikini Atoll, our ancestors actually believed the United States and allowed the United States to bomb our islands! Do we really think the U.S. Congress is going to fund the clean up and restoration of Bikini? No, we don't. We stopped believing in the U.S. Congress.

So, what are we, the elected leaders of the People of Bikini, doing?

We are taking the reins into our hands.

The budgets in recent years met some of our needs, but certain needs were not addressed and began accumulating, plus, the budgets did not account for the future. This year's budget of over \$11 million dollars takes into consideration the need to renovate and build new houses that were damaged by king tides, it also restores health care for those needing care outside of the Marshall Islands, and it provides for educational scholarships. We could not do that with the recent budgets. To mitigate the effects of the spring tides, we need to build good sea-walls or riprap on the sides of Kili where the water comes over, but that costs a lot of money and that is never allowed in our limited budgets.

Our opposition posted pictures of cars for the Council saying we had spent our 2018 budget monies on those cars. Actually those were used cars, costing less than \$10,000 each including freight, and were from last year's budget. Those cars were not from the 2018 budget or the \$11 million we withdrew.

Also our opposition posted pictures of people holding cash when we distributed cash. That cash was from our hardship allowance from the Claims Trust Fund to assist families affected by the high tides. Those monies were not from the Resettlement Trust Fund. Our own lawyer said it was crazy to distribute cash instead of checks, and we have learned.

We did not distribute the \$11 million or spend it all at once. We still have it in the bank. We are watching and ensuring each dollar is spent on Council-approved categories. The Council held numerous public meetings on the budget, and everyone had a chance to input their opinions. In the end the Council passed a budget for FY 2018 which we are now operating under. We understand that with the authority over the Resettlement Trust Fund comes the responsibility to make right choices for the People of Bikini. We will utilize these funds for the good of our people. These funds are not to benefit a few people. The budget was determined by the elected Council in a democratic way. We are

dedicated and determined to make the right choices. The Mayor does not act unilaterally but responds to the People of Bikini with the support of the KBE elected Council.

The total Resettlement Trust Fund monies at the end of September, 2017 was around \$67 million. We took out \$11 million and are spending it frugally. We will also hire experts to advise us how to invest our money wisely in the stock market to yield the best returns. We would have liked to keep the \$11 million in the Resettlement Trust Fund, but the rumors about a letter or a formula that would be applied to our ability to withdraw our own monies, caused us to withdraw the \$11 million to ensure we had enough for this fiscal year's budget.

We will also be leveraging our money to attract investments in tourism, infrastructure development, restoration of land, and immediately revive our tourism. We plan beginning income-generating projects that will eventually lead to a lesser reliance on the Resettlement Trust Fund. These projects could not get funding under previous KBE administrations because access to the funds were limited.

Bikini Atoll is a world-class diving destination and was so for many years, but about 15 years ago diving stopped bringing in revenues when Bikini shut down its operation due to unreliable air transportation to and from Bikini. We plan to fix that.

With private management, our world-class diving operation will be resurrected.

But not all people like to dive. We will develop an informational tour, taking advantage of the 2010 United Nations designation of Bikini Atoll as a World Heritage Site. What have we done to exploit that designation? Nothing so far, because of limited funds. But my administration plans to change that.

Bikini Atoll will become a sought-after diving and tourism destination once more, bringing in revenues to the KBE Local Government, lessening the reliance on the Resettlement Trust Fund.

So we went from budgets of \$8 million that barely provided for sustenance of our population, to one this year which tries to address some of the needs that have been building up, and then comes this ridiculous formula based not on reality but some non-applicable, non-realistic justification that will completely hurt our people.

We know what our people need. We are not sitting on our hands. We are planning for the future. We will not come back and get slapped in the face again. We and the RMI National Government are still waiting for the U.S. Congress to address the RMI's Changed Circumstances Petition that was filed almost 2 decades ago. We have been slapped enough. Is that what you fear? Well, fear no more. We are stating right here that the U.S. has continued to let us down, and we don't expect anything different.

The international community will become aware of this lack of concern for the cleanup of our island but we do not expect the U.S. to keep its promise. We know the U.S. is not going to keep its promise to clean up our beautiful island, so please just leave us alone and let us work with the money that we have in order to plan for the future of our people.

The Resettlement Trust Fund monies belong to the people of Bikini, not the U.S. Federal government,

and we cannot accept the restrictions of Senate Bill 2182.

Under Senate Bill 2182, we will be receiving only about \$2 million per year to feed, to provide scholarships, to provide healthcare, etc., to our displaced population on Kili, on Ejit, and on Majuro and elsewhere. That is grossly inadequate.

I again reiterate, the KBE Resettlement Trust Fund monies are not US government or federal monies, those funds belong to the People of Bikini. If those monies belong to the People of Bikini, what gives the federal government, through the Department of the Interior the right to tell us how to spend our money?

We have the best interest of the people of Bikini at heart, and if we do not perform, they will not elect us again, but we need the opportunity to move ahead and not just sit back and get slapped in the face with old colonialist and paternalistic systems that demean our honor and our integrity and treat us like children who do not know what they are doing.

We appreciate the authority, and we assure the committee and the People of Bikini that we will be good stewards of the money, and we will not spend it away.

Madame Chair, there are some of our elders in this room that remember your father's and mother's visit to Bikini back in 1996. Chairman Senator Frank Murkowski and your mother, Nancy, swam in the waters of Bikini and your father dove the sunken ships in those waters. You are most welcome to also come and visit our lovely islands of Bikini.

We will revive tourism and bring in revenues that will sustain us, but we need the chance to decide for ourselves, and we need the recognition that we are adult elected leaders who know what is best for the People of Bikini, and we won't come back knocking on your door.

Thank you Madame Chair.