The Republic of Kiribati’s Submission in Accordance With Resolution 78/240 entitled Addressing the Legacy of Nuclear Weapons 31 May 2024

Section I. Introduction

The Republic of Kiribati extends its gratitude to the UN Secretary-General for the opportunity to provide our views and proposals on the critical issues of victim assistance and environmental remediation related to the legacy of nuclear weapons. As the co-penholder of the resolution "Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons" (A/RES/78/240), Kiribati recognizes the importance of addressing the profound humanitarian and environmental impacts resulting from nuclear weapons.

In accordance with A/RES/78/240 operative paragraph 4, Kiribati’s submission reflects its commitment to affected communities through victim assistance, environmental remediation, and international support.

Section II. Background/History of Nuclear Testing

The Republic of Kiribati is a Pacific Small Island Developing State situated in the central Pacific Ocean on the International Date Line and near the equator. Kiribati is composed of 33 atolls and reef islands dispersed over a vast area of approximately 3.5 million square kilometers.

Kiribati is divided into three main island groups: the Gilbert Islands, the Phoenix Islands, and the Line Islands. The Gilbert Islands, where most of the population resides, include Tarawa, the capital. The Phoenix Islands are an isolated group of atolls and reef islands in the central Pacific Ocean, known for their significant biodiversity and conservation efforts. The Line Islands, including Kiritimati and Malden Islands, are historically significant as the site of the thermonuclear weapons testing programs of the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

Kiribati’s experience with nuclear weapons began at the height of the Cold War. At the time, the UK expressed a desire to build a hydrogen bomb to maintain its position as a world power. In searching for a test site, the UK eventually settled on a part of Kiribati, Kiritimati Island. The island was prepared for nuclear weapons testing starting in June of 1956 by the construction of an airstrip, a military encampment, and bunkers.\(^1\) The British nuclear weapons test series on Kiritimati was code-named Operation Grapple.

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Figure 1 below represents a map of Kiritimati Island and situates some of the key military sites developed during the nuclear weapons testing programme. Site A was a scientific facility and Sites L, and D were used for nuclear weapons testing and as observation bunkers.

![Figure 1: United States Department of Defense map of Kiritimati Island from 1983](image)

Operation Grapple consisted of a series of atomic and hydrogen bomb tests conducted in 1957 and 1958. The tests were codenamed Grapple 1-3, Grapple X, Grapple Y, and Grapple Z. In total, nine nuclear explosive devices were tested by the UK during the Grapple series. These tests aimed to develop and demonstrate Britain's capability to deploy thermonuclear weapons.

Following Operation Grapple, the US conducted Operation Dominic I, which consisted of 24 nuclear tests conducted on Kiritimati Island in Kiribati. The primary responsibility and execution of these tests were up to the US, but there was significant collaboration with the UK due to their Mutual Defense Agreement. The scope and scale of Operation Dominic I was extensive, involving a range of tests that included airburst and surface detonations. The motivations for each of these tests ranged from testing different weapons designs to responding to the Soviet Union's breach of the tripartite moratorium.

Throughout the testing period, many officials and personnel involved in the operations were from neighboring Pacific regions, including Fiji. New Zealander service persons were among those who participated in the nuclear tests, often without adequate protective measures, as were the British soldiers. The involvement of both Fiji and New Zealand military forces underscores the broader regional impact of the nuclear testing and illustrates the interconnectedness of Pacific Island nations in this historical context. Their participation also highlights that the consequences of the nuclear tests extended beyond Kiritimati and Malden. It affected neighboring Pacific States and thus created a shared legacy of environmental and health challenges. The legacy of these tests continues to be felt today, as environmental contamination and health issues persist among the affected communities.

**Section III. Victim Assistance Needs**
The nuclear tests conducted on Kiritimati Island have left a lasting legacy of severe health issues among the island's inhabitants. The 500 citizens of Kiribati living in Kiritimati at the time of the tests received little protection and inadequate warning. Not being aware of the dangers of such tests, most of them lifted the tarpaulin cover provided for them to catch a glimpse of the spectacular display of the intensely hot cloud of fire above them. Many members of this community experienced a multitude of illnesses and health complications. There were numerous cases of cancer, congenital disabilities, and newborn abnormalities. Such health issues persisted for descendants of those on the island when the tests were carried out.

a. Engagement with the Citizens of Kiritimati - Survey

To highlight and document the extensive humanitarian and medical consequences, the Kiribati Office of Tourism for the Phoenix, Line and Gilbert Islands and Kiribati youth, in collaboration with civil society groups and support from the Mission of Kiribati to the UN, conducted an informal survey among 20 citizens of Kiritimati to learn more about this legacy.

Interviewees reported a range of health problems affecting multiple generations. These include skin diseases, cancers, birth defects, blindness, and chronic pain. The majority of interviewees highlighted the importance of compensation.2

One particularly powerful statement comes from Aana Tabwi (50 years old), who vividly encapsulates the personal and familial struggles faced by the survivors and their descendants:

I have a daughter [who] has skin rashes from her birth, and one of my brothers also has this same skin disease. One of my father's sisters was abnormal; her brain is not functioning. I, Nei Aana Tabwi, also have a breast disease, where mucus discharges from my breast when breastfeeding my child. My first-born child experienced this disease of mine when breastfeeding him at a very young age.

Similarly, a second-generation survivor shared that her mother gave birth to a deformed child immediately after the tests, and many women revealed that they experienced miscarriages during that time. These testimonies highlight the pervasive and hereditary nature of the health impacts, illustrating the long-term consequences of the nuclear tests. They underscore the direct, intergenerational, and persistent nature of the suffering endured by the Island's inhabitants. There is an urgent need for international intervention, support, and compensation to address these profound humanitarian issues and achieve justice for the affected communities.

b. Testimonies

Oemwa Johnson is a fourth-generation survivor who attended the Second Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in New York in November of 2023. She provided the following testimony:

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2 Compensation means victim assistance.
As a fourth-generation survivor of these nuclear tests and having experienced firsthand the impact on my family's health, I firmly believe that ongoing support is necessary to ensure the well-being and recovery of all affected families. The long-lasting health effects and displacement endured by the communities on Christmas (Kiritimati) Island cannot be understated. Governments and international bodies must prioritize the provision of sufficient resources and assistance to address the societal impacts of these nuclear tests and provide affected communities with the necessary support to rebuild their lives. Only by doing so can we begin to mitigate the long-term consequences of the nuclear weapons tests and ensure a brighter future for those who have endured the repercussions.

Like countless others, my family carries the heavy legacy of these tests. This is my family's experience during the nuclear testing days:

My great-grandfather, a fisherman, slowly withered away from lung cancer that doctors said was 'unexplained'—a phrase that still echoes in our family gatherings, I say, my voice raw with sadness inherited through generations. My grandfather, once vibrant and full of laughter, now suffers from hearing loss and other health issues in his mid-70s, a chilling reminder of the radioactive dance the wind forced them to endure.

He remembers the day the soldiers came, their loud boots echoing on the coral sand. He was fourteen years old, watching in fear as they were all gathered in a tennis court on London Christmas Island before the nuclear tests took place. They were only given a blanket to cover themselves to shield from the spark and to cover their ears to prevent damage. The air was thick with a strange metallic tang. They were promised a temporary relocation—'a few weeks, maybe'—but years melted into decades. Some were sent on a ship to the nearest islands, such as Canton and Fanning Island, as there was not enough space in the tennis court for everyone.

When they finally returned, the island was different. The fish tasted strange; the coconut palms bore fewer fruits. Then whispers started of cancers, of children born with deformities. The fear became another heirloom passed down with our stories and songs.

My grandparents had nine children a few years after the testing. Two of their eldest children were born premature and died. The fourth oldest, before my Dad, suffered from severe migraines in high school and died at the age of 15. My Dad and I are also diagnosed with the same condition. This is uncommon, and it is not just my family that has experienced this; countless others have faced the same. The fight for compensation and recognition of our suffering is not just a personal crusade; it is a fight for the soul of a community poisoned by the Cold War's shadow.

Section IV. International Support and Assistance

a. Request to the User States
A common theme across all interviews is the absence of adequate assistance or compensation from the States responsible for the nuclear tests. Despite the profound health impacts and environmental degradation, none of the interviewees reported receiving any form of international support from these States. This lack of assistance exacerbates their suffering and leaves them struggling to manage the severe health issues caused by the nuclear fallout.

b. Request to the International Community

The interviewees expressed a strong need for international support, particularly from the countries responsible for the nuclear tests. There is a call for compensation for the suffering endured by the Island's inhabitants and practical assistance in cleaning up the contaminated sites. For example, a second-generation survivor emphasized the importance of the US and UK coming back to clean up the mess they created and compensate the affected families. This sentiment is echoed by other interviewees, who seek justice and reparations for the health issues and environmental damage caused by the tests.

The health and environmental impacts suffered by citizens of the Kiritimati Island motivates Kiribati to advocate ardently for international nuclear justice at all UN forums including the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

c. Request for Memorial Spaces

The severe impacts of the nuclear tests motivate the community on Kiritimati Island to memorialize their remarkable suffering. Interviewees have expressed a strong desire for communal spaces, such as mwaneabas (traditional meeting houses), for remembrance and gathering. These spaces would serve as places to honor the experiences of the affected families and ensure ongoing awareness and support. This emphasis on communal remembrance underscores the importance of collective healing, nuclear justice, and solidarity in addressing the long-term consequences of the nuclear tests.

In alignment with these sentiments, the citizens of Kiritimati Island have proposed several projects aimed at commemorating and beautifying historic sites related to Operations Grapple and Dominic. These include: the restoration and beautification of significant historic sites, the creation of a nuclear test photo gallery featuring donated photos from the families of veterans, and the establishment of the Kiritimati Anti-Nuclear Park. Additionally, the citizens of Kiritimati Island have proposed a Kiritimati Memorial, akin to the Honolulu Memorial in Honolulu and the World War II Memorial in Washington D.C., dedicated to those who were on Kiritimati Island during these operations. These initiatives collectively aim to foster remembrance, honor the affected communities, and promote awareness of the island's historical significance.

Section V. Environmental Assessment and Remediation

The nuclear tests have caused significant environmental contamination of Kiritimati Island, posing ongoing health risks to its inhabitants. Interviewees pointed out specific areas that are particularly contaminated and in need of urgent cleanup. These include the outskirts near Banana village and Tabon te Korota (between Poland and Cook villages), where remnants of nuclear contaminants and other hazardous materials are still present. For example, the common food source for many of the Island’s inhabitants, fish, continues to be contaminated.
Persistent contamination does not only affect the current inhabitants, but also poses a threat to future generations.

**Section VI. Kiribati and the TPNW**

As a State affected by nuclear testing, Kiribati recognizes its important role in helping its citizens request assistance from the international community and the need for the international community to help all affected countries. This drive prompted Kiribati to take on a leadership role in promoting and shaping the implementation of the positive obligations of the TPNW.

Since 2021, Kiribati has been serving as a co-facilitator, along with Kazakhstan, on the humanitarian and positive obligations (articles related to victim assistance, environmental remediation, international cooperation, and assistance) of the TPNW. As a co-facilitator, Kiribati has taken on the responsibility of representing the voices of Pacific States. It has strongly advocated for the establishment of an international trust fund to help victims of nuclear testing. Kiribati is proud of its leadership in this arena.

**Section VII. Request for An International Symposium on Victim Assistance and Environmental Remediation**

Due to the legacy of nuclear tests, Kiribati is recommending the international community to convene a symposium on victim assistance and environmental remediation to take place in New York. This symposium could provide a forum, where survivors and affected States can share their testimonies on the humanitarian and environmental impacts of nuclear weapons and their requests for the international community to provide critical support.

In addition to providing a space for survivors to express themselves, this forum could also include perspectives from both the scientific community and the United Nations · Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation on relevant scientific and factual information about radioactive contamination.

At the end of the symposium, the conference participants could prepare a list of requests related to victim assistance and environmental remediation for the international community to consider at relevant forums on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.