Views on addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons

“Requests the Secretary-General to seek the views and proposals of Member States regarding efforts and ongoing needs related to victim assistance and environmental assessment and remediation, and to submit a substantiative report, with an annex containing those views, to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session, for further discussion by Member States.”

The United States has long recognized the effects of its nuclear testing program and continues to provide significant technical assistance, resources, and financial assistance to affected people and communities. The significant scale of these past and present efforts reflects the seriousness with which we take the issue. We note the intent of resolution 78/240, entitled “Addressing the legacy of nuclear weapons: providing victim assistance and environmental remediation to Member States affected by the use or testing of nuclear weapons,” to bring the topic of such victim assistance to the forefront.

We remember the history of nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands and honor the contribution the Marshallese have made and acknowledge the hardships the Marshallese have endured. Since the nuclear testing program, the United States has provided more than $600 million to affected communities; adjusted for inflation, the United States has provided more than $1 billion to affected communities. This support included direct financial settlement of nuclear claims, resettlement funds, and rehabilitation of affected atolls, as well as ongoing radiological monitoring, technical assistance, and radiation-related health care costs.

Prior to the 1986 Compact of Free Association (“Compact”) and its related agreements, the United States provided financial and technical assistance to address the nuclear legacy during the Trusteeship period. This included approximately $250 million for direct cleanup, environmental rehabilitation, resettlement, and compensation for nuclear claims, as well as environmental monitoring and medical support of affected communities.

The United States has accepted and acted on its responsibility to the citizens of the Republic of the Marshall Islands through the longstanding, full and final settlement that the United States and the Marshall Islands reached in 1986 under the Compact of Free Association and a related subsidiary agreement. The 1986 Compact and the subsidiary agreement referred to in Section 177 of the Compact constitute a full settlement of all claims, past, present and future in any way related to the U.S. testing program. Separate from the assistance provided to the RMI related to the nuclear testing program, the United States continues to also provide the RMI with substantial assistance aimed at promoting long-term economic self-sufficiency across key sectors of the environment, health, education, private sector development, and infrastructure, as well as support for basic public service delivery including postal service.

The United States also has passed legislation to address nuclear weapons legacy issues within the United States. The Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), enacted in 1990, established an administrative program for claims relating to atmospheric nuclear testing and uranium
industry employment. It provided a one-time benefit payment to persons who may have
developed cancer or other specified diseases after being exposed to radiation from atomic
weapons testing or uranium mining, milling, or transporting. To date, the U.S. Department of
Justice has awarded over $2.6 billion in benefits to more than 41,000 claimants. Although the
RECA Program is currently set to sunset in June 2024, there are proposals under consideration to
extend or expand it.

In addition to technical assistance and financial resources, the United States fully supports the
Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and is committed to work to achieve its entry
into force. Consistent with the goals of the CTBT, since 1992 the United States has observed a
moratorium on nuclear explosive testing and calls on all states possessing nuclear weapons to
declare or maintain such a moratorium.

The United States believes the Secretary-General’s report could provide insight into some
assistance and remediation issues that have already been settled or addressed. In order to achieve
that aim, the report should be balanced and inclusive of the views of all UN Member States. We
thank the Secretary-General for posting our full-length submission online.