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Positive Obligation Framework: Forgotten stories of Fiji Veterans exposure to Nuclear Testing on Kiritimati Island

Working paper submitted by the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons on behalf of the Fiji Kirisimasi Island Veterans Association and the Returned Soldiers and Ex-servicemen's association of Fiji

I. Context

1. In 1957 to 1958, Britain conducted nine atmospheric nuclear tests at Kirisimasi Island (Christmas Island) and Malden in the central Pacific. At the time of the Kirisimasi Island build up, 423 Fijian enlisted to boost the numbers of the armed forces. Of these, nearly 300 Fijian soldiers and sailors traveled to Christmas Island in the late 1950s for the nuclear tests, together with thousands of British military personnel and 528 New Zealand sailors. The Fijian military personnel were serving under British command as members of the Royal Fiji Military Force (RFMR) and the Fiji Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (FRNVR). Other Fijians witnessed one of the tests, including FRNVR commander Stan Brown and the late Ratu Sir Penaia Ganilau (one of Fiji's highest chiefs who was late knighted and served as Governor General and President of Fiji).

2. The unique history of our veterans has left a lasting impact on their health, resulting in various illnesses, genetic problems, and a dire need for medical assistance. Unfortunately, our health system is currently ill-equipped to address the specialized needs of these veterans, and they find themselves displaced due to the limited availability of specialists, equipment, and medicines in Fiji and some veterans find themselves displaced away from their loved ones in Fiji for better medical care.

3. In light of this critical situation, we propose the establishment of a positive obligation framework for Fiji veterans and their families under Article 6 of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) to provide victim assistance to our nuclear testing veterans. Fiji, as a state party to the TPNW, has a responsibility to ensure the well-being and care of those affected by nuclear testing, and Article 6 & 7 specifically addresses victim assistance, recognizing the unique challenges faced by individuals and communities directly affected by nuclear weapons use and also

seeking International cooperation and assistance for better healthcare, assistance, compensations for our veterans and their families.

3. To expedite the implementation of this framework, Fiji can demonstrate its commitment to fulfilling the obligations outlined in the TPNW and ensuring the well-being of our veterans who have unjustly sacrificed their life and health.

II. Recommendations:

4. The positive obligations framework should include:

(a) **Thorough Outreach Program:** Conduct a comprehensive outreach program targeting Fiji veterans and their families. This program will identify and address their specific needs, ensuring that they are aware of and have access to the services provided under Fiji's positive obligation framework;

(b) **Hospital Development:** Construct a specialized hospital dedicated to addressing the health needs of nuclear testing veterans. Equip the hospital with advanced medical technology and facilities required for the diagnosis and treatment of radiation-related illnesses. Name the Ward Kirisimasi Island. Re-establish a veterans' archive;

(c) **Medical Assistance and Rehabilitation:** Establish specialized medical facilities within Fiji, equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure, specialists, and medicines. Provide comprehensive rehabilitation programs tailored to the specific health issues resulting from exposure to radiation;

(d) **Genetic Counselling and Research:** Implement genetic counselling services to assist affected families and initiate research projects to enhance our understanding of the genetic problems associated with exposure to nuclear testing;

(e) **Training for Local Doctors:** Sponsor local doctors to undergo overseas training programs focused on radiation-related illnesses and their manifestations. Develop expertise in the diagnosis, treatment, and long-term care of individuals affected by exposure to radiation. To have at least 12- 20 doctors sent over for studies each year;

(f) **Community Integration and Support:** Develop programs to facilitate the integration of affected individuals into their communities. Offer psychological support and ensure their inclusion in social and economic activities;

(g) **Education curriculum:** Integrate educational programs into the national curriculum to raise awareness about the history of nuclear testing and allow veterans to tell their own story and its impact on them. This will foster understanding and support within the wider community;

(h) **International Collaboration:** Seek collaboration with international partners, to leverage their expertise, resources, and networks in addressing the unique challenges faced by our veterans;

(i) **Assistance in Talanoa with Britain:** Engage in diplomatic discussions with the United Kingdom to address the unjust treatment of Fiji's nuclear veterans. Seek compensation and acknowledgment for the adverse effects of nuclear testing on their health and well-being;

(j) **Independent Office for Assistance and Compensation for Fiji veterans:** Establish an independent office responsible for facilitating assistance and compensation to nuclear testing veterans. This office will streamline the process, ensuring timely and fair support for affected individuals and their families;

(k) **International Assistance for Overseas Veterans:** Extend support to Fiji nuclear veterans residing overseas by collaborating with relevant authorities in their host countries. Ensure they have access to necessary medical, social, and economic assistance if they choose to remain in their current residence.
