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1. COMMEMORATION

53rd Anniversary of First Nuclear Weapons Test - Maohi Nui (French Polynesia)
On July 2, 2019, an estimated 2,000 people marched across Pape’ete, Tahiti, to commemorate the 53rd anniversary of the first French nuclear weapons test at Mururoa. Marchers from different organisations marked the occasion. At Place Pouvanaa a Oopa, coffins symbolising the devastating impacts on human health, life and the environment after thirty years of testing, were placed down.

Symbols of nuclear test impacts. (Photo: Association 193)

Pouvanaa a Oopa Monument in Papeete, Tahiti 2018.
(Photo: Vanessa Griffen)
Thousands of marchers from all over Maohi Nui gathered together to remember the history of the nuclear tests and their ongoing impacts (see Radio1 Tahiti on Facebook live, Interviews in French.) The Maohi Protestant Church, test workers and veterans’ group Mururoa e Tatou and Association 193, as well as independence politicians, took part. The event also commemorated the Tahitian leader Pouvanaa a Oopa and highlighted test victims’ current difficulties in getting compensation for ill health.

A banner at July 2 2019 march. (Photo from: Tahiti1 Radio-FB video)
2. YOUTH RESPONSE - GENERATION NOW RESPONSES TO NUCLEAR LEGACY

MISA4thePacific Release New Campaign #MyFishIsYourFish

In July, Marshall Islands Student Association based in Fiji, MISA4thePacific, produced a video for their #MyFishIsYourFish campaign and for showing at the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI) National Voters Registration Day, 2019.

The video blends archival footage of nuclear testing images from the 1950’s tests, with contemporary interviews with young and old from Marshall Islands, expressing their views on the tests and nuclear justice.

MISA4thePacific want to raise awareness of the risks of radioactive wastes from nuclear tests leaking from the dome on Runit island, potentially harming marine resources not just of Marshall Islands, but all the Pacific.

MISA4thePacific asserts: *Mour Iumin Lojet*, which translates as “My Fish Is Your Fish”. What happens in one part of the Pacific Islands’ shared ocean, will impact on fish everywhere in the wider ocean.

MISA also sees climate change and nuclear weapons risks are related.

The “My Fish is Your Fish” campaign is part of MISA4thePacific’s “continued effort to raise awareness on the nuclear history of the Marshall Islands, the imminent effects it has on the Pacific region and the critical importance to advocate for a nuclear free world”.

Youngsolwara urges Pacific Island leaders to ratify the 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

On August 15, Youngsolwara, a regional Pacific youth network, called on Pacific Island leaders to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons based on 3 core ideas expressed in the following statement:

“We call on our leaders to sign and ratify the 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, and support efforts to resolve nuclear testing legacy issues in the Pacific. In particular we call on the governments of the USA, Britain, France, Japan (post-Forum Dialogue Partners) to ensure the following:

“Remediation: We need independent support of citizen science projects to collect relevant data by and for our Pacific communities. The known and unknown levels of transuranics in our ocean, lands, and food sources compromises our inherent right to food sovereignty and compromises our resiliency in times of peace and crisis including the climate crises.”

Youngsolwara points to the remediation needed for addressing various cancer impacts. It noted that cancer projections in Marshall Islands were “astronomical” and was concerned about other low-dose radiation illnesses Pacific peoples continue to face.

Finally, on Restitution, Youngsolwara states:
“Nuclear affected communities are entitled to restitution. Nuclear claims throughout the Pacific have been disregarded by the offending nations who now want to claim ‘shared values’ with Pacific peoples. We call upon our Pacific leaders to educate the offending nations on Pacific values, and advocate for restitution for Pacific peoples.”

3. PACIFIC ISLANDS NUCLEAR ISSUES (HISTORY) UPDATES

Maohi Nui (French Polynesia)
Upset Over French Amendment to Nuclear Compensation Law

The nuclear workers’ association, Mururoa e Tatou, which has spent decades representing nuclear test victims, criticised the ineffectiveness of the current French compensation law and declared the need for it to be discarded. It particularly objected after a rushed amendment of the French legislative act last year, changed an earlier agreed amendment, to improve the compensation process.

Similarly, Association 193, an association also formed to assist other nuclear test victims, condemned the changes to the compensation act. It rejects a project by the French state and French Polynesian government to build a memorial site for the nuclear tests. The Association views this idea as a propaganda project and instead would like to see “apart from reparations for the victims, studies to be carried out into the genetic impact of radiation exposure.”

Marshall Islands

Independent Assessment finds radiation levels in some areas of Marshall Islands is greater than Chernobyl

Three independent studies on Marshall Islands’ background gamma radiation and soil activity, food, and crater sediments have been undertaken by Columbia University researchers and published through the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America (PNAS) on 30 July 2019.

Testing 9 islands in 4 atolls, the background gamma radiation and soil activity study found “low external gamma radiation levels on some islands in the Enewetak Atoll and Utrik Atoll, and elevated levels on Enjebi Island in the Enewetak Atoll, on Bikini Atoll, and on Naen Island in the Rongelap Atoll.”

The findings assert that in some parts of the Marshall Islands, the concentration of plutonium-238 levels are up to 15 to 1,000 times higher than those in Chernobyl and Fukushima power plants. [Two nuclear power plants in Ukraine and Japan respectively, where accidents occurred releasing radiation that caused widespread contamination which continues on these sites.]

The food study focused on a measurement of high and variable levels of celsium-137 (Cs) contamination of fruits collected from 11 islands from 4 atolls in 2017. Over 200 fruits were collected, primarily coconuts and pandanus.

The report found, the Cs contamination levels in fruits in Bikini and Rongelap atolls (particularly Bikini, Naen and Rongelap island) exceeded the action limits devised by the IPPNW in 2016 and the governments of Belarus, Russia, Ukraine and Japan’s standards. The levels found in Marshall Islands have exceeded values found in Fukushima in 2018 and in Chernobyl found from 2011-2015.

Finally, the crater study of radiation maps of ocean sediment from the Castle Bravo crater found
large values of plutonium – (239, 240), americium-241, and bismuth-207 in the crater’s underwater sediment and observed a surprising number of aquatic organisms living in the crater.

The studies only confirm the worst fears that Marshall Islanders live with and over which many Pacific islanders’ protested nuclear tests for decades – the knowledge of what the nuclear contamination and radiation from the tests would cause to human beings and all forms of life in their islands. The science was known when the tests were conducted. In the Marshall Islands’ case, this newly released study confirms more than 70 years after the nuclear tests, that contamination levels are very high and continue to have deadly impacts.

Kiribati
Study on the impacts of British Nuclear Testing on Kiritimati Island

A preliminary study which includes interviews with residents of Kiritimati Island about the British nuclear testing period in the 1950s, has been undertaken by Dr Becky Alexis-Martin of Manchester Metropolitan University. In an interview with Dateline Pacific, Radio New Zealand, the scholar emphasised the limited acknowledgement and compensation by the British, regarding the impacts of their tests. With their recent “Pacific Uplift” strategy, she believes the UK should attempt to address this history.


4. PACIFIC REGIONAL NEWS - NUCLEAR ISSUES
Pacific Leaders discuss nuclear contamination.

Communiqué from the Pacific Islands Forum

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIFS) is the premier regional political body for Pacific Island states. It meets annually and has pre- and post-Forum meetings with different status members also attending. The 2019 Forum was held from 13-16th August, in Funafuti, Tuvalu.

2019 Foreign Ministers - pre-Forum Meeting – Nuclear issues discussed

This year at the Foreign Ministers Pre-Forum meeting held in Fiji from 22-26th July, nuclear issues were raised, and several references were made to the nuclear tests legacy in the Outcome statement.

The Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting held later in Tuvalu from the 13th – 16th of August 2019 also included several statements on nuclear test issues in its final communique (see below.)

Civil society networks at both meetings made statements on the nuclear legacy and urged support by the Pacific Island states for the TPNW.

At the Foreign Ministers meeting, Vanuatu urged Pacific states to ratify the Treaty on the Prohibition
of Nuclear Weapons. Vanuatu will host next year’s Forum meeting.

It is well known that the Forum has a long history of opposition to nuclear testing activity in the region which has been a clear feature in Pacific Island leaders’ discussions since the forum formed in 1971. The South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone was proposed in 1975.

The last time the forum met in Tuvalu in 1984, leaders agreed there had been disappointing progress in the international disarmament negotiations and collectively “agreed on the desirability of establishing a Nuclear Free Zone in the region at earliest possible opportunity.” They set up a Working group to convene and prepare a report which proposed the text for the treaty, which was then endorsed and opened for signing at the subsequent meeting in Rarotonga, Cook Islands, in 1985.

The Rarotonga Treaty established the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone.

While the Nauru Forum in 2018 focused on the nuclear legacy and other issues in the Pacific, including the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, the Tuvalu Forum in 2019 broadened the scope. There is strong support expressed by Pacific leaders, for multi-faceted actions to be taken on the nuclear legacy in the Pacific Islands.

Pacific Leaders’ Forum -2019 - on Nuclear tests and the humanitarian consequences

Here are the items from the 2019 Forum’s latest communique:

“Nuclear Contaminants

28. Leaders expressed concern for the significance of the potential threat of nuclear contamination, World War II wrecks and unexploded ordinances to the health and security of the Blue Pacific, her people and prospects, acknowledged the importance of addressing the long-standing issues of nuclear testing legacy in the Pacific and called for the operationalisation of the provisions of the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty (Rarotonga Treaty), as necessary.

29. Leaders recalled that the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres raised concerns about the nuclear waste storage facility on Runit Island, Eniwetak Atoll, Republic of the Marshall Islands as ‘a kind of coffin’ and warned of health consequences to the local communities resulting from the nuclear tests. Leaders reiterated their ongoing concern on nuclear contamination issues in the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and particularly in respect of the nuclear test site at Runit. Leaders called on the United States Government to increase its monitoring and to address health consequences related to the nuclear testing programme.

30. Leaders agreed to continue support towards bilateral, regional and multilateral action to assist the Republic of the Marshall Islands in its efforts to engage the United States Government in a meaningful way, in order to achieve for the Republic of the Marshall Islands, full, fair and a just resolution of all outstanding nuclear testing legacy issues, and agreed to submit letters to the United States Government urging the United States Government to take further action to meaningfully address the ongoing impacts of its Nuclear Testing Programme; and to the UN Secretary-General requesting the assistance of the relevant and competent UN agencies and any other partners in addressing the ongoing impacts of nuclear testing in the Pacific.

31. Leaders further recalled their decision from 2016 and reaffirmed in 2017 that the Secretariat coordinate assistance by CROP Agencies to the Republic of Kiribati and the Republic of the Marshall Islands in addressing ongoing impacts of nuclear testing, including inter alia, human rights, environmental contamination, and health impacts, and acknowledged the ongoing dialogue between the CROP Agencies, particularly SPREP and SPC, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands National Nuclear Commission. Leaders further tasked the Secretariat to report to Leaders at their next meeting in Vanuatu.

32. Leaders endorsed the need for the commissioning of an appropriate body to undertake
a comprehensive, independent and objective scientific assessment of the contamination issue in the Pacific, including in the nuclear test site at Runit.

33. Leaders agreed to request a meeting with the United States President to discuss the current and emerging issues of the nuclear testing legacy in the Republic of the Marshall Islands and in the Blue Pacific.

34. Leaders urged members to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.”

[Although not specifically mentioned in the communique, we note the many issues of nuclear contamination, health and environment consequences of nuclear testing that exist in Moahi Nui (French Polynesia), which bears the burden of 30 years of Pacific nuclear testing, from 1966-1996.]

Decolonisation of French Polynesia –

Presentation by Maohi Protestant Church - United Nations Special Committee on Decolonisation

Reverend Taaroarii Maraea addressed the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization (C-24) and also had the support of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC).

In June 2019, Reverend Taaroarii Maraea, President of the Ma’ohi Protestant Church issued the following statement to the Special Committee on Decolonization (C-24):

[Eds: we have lightly edited by adding some paragraph breaks for ease of reading.]

“Madam Chair, Distinguished Members of the Special Committee,

I have the honour to address you in my capacity as President of the Ma’ohi Protestant Church. I wish to express my deepest gratitude for allowing (me) to speak before this Committee on the question of Ma’ohi-Nui/French Polynesia. I wish to draw the attention of the Committee to the communication submitted in early October 2018 to the Office of the


In this regard, the International Law Commission is to be commended for its ongoing work on the draft articles on crimes against humanity. This work is especially important in giving further clarity to what constitutes such a crime and the requisite recompense. I take note that the 2019 Working Paper on Ma’ohi-Nui/French Polynesia makes only a short reference to both ICC and Human Rights Committee complaints while the draft resolution on Ma’ohi-Nui/French Polynesia omits any reference to it altogether. We continue to pose the question as to why these developments are not worthy of UN consideration, or whether there is undue pressure exerted by the administering Power behind the scenes to censor such references. Nevertheless, our people will continue to monitor how the UN deals with these stealth diplomacy tactics in future. To this end, I recall that as a presidential candidate, Emmanuel Macron stated that: “Colonization is a crime. It’s a crime against humanity. It’s truly barbarous and its part of a past that we need to confront by apologizing to those against whom we committed these acts... At the same time, we must not sweep this past under the rug.” We hold the now-French President to this commitment.

Nuclear tests declared a crime against humanity in a banner at people’s commemoration day march, July 2, 2019, Papeete, Tahiti. (Photo from Tahiti 1 Radio1 - FB video.)
However, the actions of a UN member State and P-5 member [France] is that of a contemporary colonial power utterly dismissive of Article 73 of the U.N. Charter, reflecting the opposite of his earlier lofty words. It is, in fact, doing its best to "sweep the issue under the rug" by seeking to persecute those who have stood bravely in the face of the colonial power.

This was one of the motives of the Ma’ohi Protestant Church for submitting an official communication to the relevant U.N. Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Committee. Recently, the Administering Power monitored a revision process of the bilateral Organic Law regarding Ma’ohi-Nui/French Polynesia within its Parliament in Paris. As a matter of fact, the new preambular paragraph of such Organic Law now reflects a so-called “positive contribution” provided by the territory of Ma’ohi-Nui/French Polynesia in favour of the colonial nuclear programme implemented by France. This provocative language currently being adopted by the French Parliament is an outrageous “misinterpretation” of the painful history and the sufferings that the Ma’ohi People went through without its consent. The Ma’ohi Protestant Church is nevertheless extremely pleased that the Committee resolution this year has restored an amended version of the paragraph in its 2019 resolution on our territory, and we strongly request that the committee ensures that the "continuous updates" requested of the Secretary-General in the resolution are far more extensive than the two previous reports. Thank You, Madam Chair.”

The Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) General Secretary, Reverend James Bhagwan has issued an official statement expressing support for Maohi Nui at the Committee and PCC also showed support for the national demonstrations on July 2 in Tahiti.

“Recalling that the third International Decade was supposed to focus on small island Territories, the Special Committee’s silence on the implementation of decolonization mandates is deafening,” Bhagwan said.

He suggested that a work programme would give member states valuable insight into the situation and separate fact from fiction and recommended that such an approach be initiated without the participation of the administering power.

The PCC accompanied the Maohi Nui delegation to the UN to show the solidarity of Pacific churches with the decolonisation movement in the French-held territory.”

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5. NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT NEWS

International Day Against Nuclear Tests on August 29

On August 29 was the International Day Against Nuclear Weapons Tests as designated by the United Nations. It commemorates the day of 29 August 1991, when the Semipalatinsk nuclear test range in Kazakhstan was officially shut down.

Of the 2000 nuclear tests performed in the world, 400 of these were undertaken by the Soviet Union and Russia in the desert of the Semipalatinsk Test Range. In December 2009, at the 64th session of the United Nations General Assembly, at the initiative of the Government of Kazakhstan, the UN declared this date as the International Day Against Nuclear Tests, unanimously adopted by resolution 64/45.
On 29th August, Kazakhstan deposited its instrument of ratification for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – becoming the 26th states party to do so.

Between 1949-89, an estimated 456 Soviet nuclear tests, including 116 atmospheric tests, were carried out in Semipalatinsk test site. Kazakhstan has suffered continued health and environmental impacts from the tests.

NUCLEAR TESTS - NOT FORGOTTEN

Remembrance flowers at nuclear resistance leader Pouvanaa O Oopa’s memorial statue in Tahiti, Moahi Nui (French Polynesia). The banner asks for justice. (Photo: V Griffen)

For many Pacific Islanders, the memory of nuclear weapons testing lives on. Nuclear tests were conducted using their lands, atolls and ocean, causing death and radiation illnesses amongst many, young and old. Ongoing nuclear contamination and health impacts have affected Pacific Islands and islanders for generations now, in Maohi Nui (French Polynesia), Republic of Marshall Islands and Republic of Kiribati.

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE TOTAL ELIMINATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS – SEPTEMBER 26, 2019

STOP PRESS --- More states have signed and ratified the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW).

At a high-level signing ceremony in the United Nations in New York, 5 states ratified, and 9 states became signatories to the Treaty.

The 5 ratifications were by: Bangladesh, Kiribati, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Maldives and Trinidad and Tobago.

Congratulations to Kiribati, becoming the fourth Pacific Island country, after Palau, Samoa and Vanuatu, to ratify the TPNW.

The 9 new signatories were: Botswana, Dominica, Grenada, Lesotho, Maldives, St. Kitts and Nevis, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Zambia.

There are 79 signatories and 33 states parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (See: https://www.icanw.org/status-of-the-treaty-on-the-prohibition-of-nuclear-weapons/ for updates on all signatories and ratifications).

50 ratifications are needed to bring the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) into force.

We urge more Pacific Island states to sign and ratify the treaty.

PINIG on TPNW news: A special issue on the TPNW, disarmament and the Pacific Islands - will follow this issue, with information on the treaty and news of international and Pacific Islands’ support.

6. RESOURCES

News from the Region

- Furthermore, at the Pacific Islands Forum the Outcomes of the Civil Society and Private Sector Dialogues were released and raised critical issues of regional security, climate change, ocean health, governance and West Papua.
- Youngsolwara called upon Pacific Leaders in Tuvalu in a statement to “recognize that...
nuclear contamination spreading in the ocean risks climate change effects.”

- Pacific region countries that have ratified the TPNW treaty are the following: New Zealand, Palau, Samoa, Vanuatu and Kiribati (the latter on Sept 26, 2019.)
- Pacific Island countries that have signed the TPNW treaty are the following: Fiji, Kiribati, Palau, Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu. New Zealand, also in the Pacific region, has signed and ratified the treaty.
- ICAN Australia released “Choosing Humanity: why Australia must join the TPNW” report.
- President Hilda Heine of the Marshall Islands recently delivered a speech to the UN Climate Action Summit and implored leaders to choose “survival over selfishness, communities over coal and planet over profits”. In addition she also explained the “importance of adaptation” in the #AdaptOurWorld campaign video.
- Recently, Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner and Aka Niviâna released “Rise: From One Island to Another” and discussed the impacts of climate change and militarisation on the Marshall Islands.

Books


NEW PUBLICATION: Media release

By PANG and BLUE OCEAN LAW

The Pacific Network on Globalisation (PANG) based in Fiji and Blue Ocean Law (BOL) in Palau, have released a report highlighting how France’s ongoing control of French Polynesia’s natural resources violates the basic human right of self-determination.

Entitled “Enduring Colonization: How France’s Continuing Control of French Polynesian Resources Violates the International Law of Self-Determination”, the report is an independent policy and law analysis of the situation faced by French Polynesia and its peoples, who remain under the effective administrative and political control of France. Despite the pretences of autonomy, France’s policies, particularly with respect to French Polynesia’s vast maritime territory and marine resources, show no signs of relinquishing effective control over strategic access or future resource exploitation. According to attorney Julian Aguon of BOL, “France appears intent on retaining its position as a global power largely through leveraging French Polynesia’s blue economy as its own.”

Based on extensive research and interviews carried out throughout French Polynesia, the report takes a nuanced look at the complex administrative system in which the people of
French Polynesia appear to enjoy autonomy over various areas of domestic concern. But in reality, it finds that the islands and area under its domain, remain hugely valuable to France both financially and politically, while French Polynesians, without true autonomy, are losing opportunities to harness their own resources and pursue locally driven economic development.

“Coming from other parts of the Pacific, we recognize a pattern of colonization and resource exploitation similar to that which has occurred throughout our region,” says PANG coordinator Maureen Penjueli. “The history of France’s devastating nuclear program in French Polynesia is equally familiar and distressing.”

In addition to a factual overview, the report provides a brief analysis of the international law of self-determination and how it applies in this case.

The report is meant to serve as a useful tool and launching point for debate for civil society, politicians, and others in French Polynesia as well as other parts of the Pacific, on the enduring legacies and new forms of colonization experienced in the Pacific Islands territories.

The report is available via this link: https://blueoceanlaw.com/files/2019/06/Enduring-Colonization_EN.pdf

And is also available in French via this link: https://blueoceanlaw.com/files/2019/06/Enduring-Colonization_FR.pdf

For more information:
Joey Tau
Email: media@pang.org.fj
Phone: +679 3316722

ABOUT PINIG – Pacific Islands Nuclear Issues Group Newsletter.

The Pacific Islands Nuclear Issues Group Newsletter is produced to share information and provide updates on activities related to the nuclear testing legacy in the Pacific Island region. It is intended to link up Pacific Islanders’ ongoing actions, research, writing and regional support in responding to the causes and consequences of nuclear testing in the Pacific Islands.

The newsletter will provide local, national, regional and international news and information to support Pacific Island efforts in seeking nuclear and environmental justice. It aims to present Pacific Island voices and actions on the nuclear legacy, disarmament, regional security and sovereignty for Pacific Island peoples.

Contributions can be sent to pinignewsletter@gmail.com

Editors: Vanessa Griffen and Talei Luscia Mangioni

Managing editor: Vanessa Griffen

Email: pinignewsletter@gmail.com

Talei Luscia Mangioni is a PhD Scholar at the Australian National University, who is researching the creative and critical histories of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific (NFIP) movement.

Vanessa Griffen is a Pacific writer, researcher, women’s rights advocate and member of the early Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific movement; she is a Pacific supporter of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), Nobel Peace Laureate 2017.