

**Statement of His Excellency Charles Paul  
Ambassador of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to the United States  
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs  
on the Implementation of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act 2024  
in Washington D.C. September 10, 2024**

Honorable Chair, Ranking Minority Member, and other Distinguished Members:  
Before I discuss the implementation of this year's Compact Amendments Act, I am compelled to say *Kommol tata* as sincerely and emphatically as I can for your leadership in its enactment and your additions to the agreements that it approved.

The package meets needs regarding the Marshall Islands more than ever before, greatly improving and strengthening the association between our nations, ours formerly part of a territory that yours administered but is now a sovereign state non-bindingly associated with yours.

The law will substantially better the quality of life of our people and address longstanding problems. It includes provisions that would enable a deeper and more equitable partnership to endure for 20 years and longer. By doing so, it not only secures our vast waters and airspace as well as our land just southwest of Hawaii, it helps ensure a free and open Pacific for all democratic nations, including Taiwan, with which we have close and lasting diplomatic relations.

Implementation is just in its initial stages since the law only became fully effective in the case of the Marshall Islands on May 1st. There are still agreements being negotiated, including a new agreement for certain U.S. services that we hope will be completed soon this month and an agreement that would enable our U.S. military veterans to receive veterans' healthcare in our islands or travel for care instead of having to live in the U.S., Canada, or the Philippines.

A new administration and parliament, Nitijela, took office in January. It is negotiating and will conclude these agreements, implementing the agreements and the law enacted last year, and developing the required plans.

Last year's actions substantially – and beneficially – changed U.S. financial assistance.

The most fundamental changes were in the Trust Fund for our people. The purpose was changed to two areas, with the uses now determined by our new administration and Nitijela.

Our administration and Nitijela have decided to use the funds that had already been contributed to benefit our people directly instead of subsidizing the Government. The new contributions are for programs for the peoples t5o address the needs of the atolls adversely affected by U.S. nuclear

bomb tests and nuclear waste disposal, and islands that have unmet claims regarding other U.S. military activities.

The Joint Economic and Financial Accountability Committee, which is responsible for ensuring compliance with the new Fiscal Procedures Agreement, concurred with our plan for the much greater Fiscal Year 2024 budgetary assistance for education; continuing health programs; infrastructure; private sector growth; the environment; special aid for Enewetak Atoll, which was resettled by its people, but still has high levels of radiation; and fiscal management, reporting, and auditing. Last week, there was a helpful meeting on the FY25 plan. The Interior Department's Insular and International Affairs Office has been very helpful in our efforts in this regard.

My Government has named its Members of the new Working Groups for the new Compact package's assistance for additional health care and to address increasing challenges of nature. We are looking forward to the U.S. naming its Members.

Plans are being developed for the new assistance for infrastructure in the civilian areas of Kwajalein Atoll, which supply much of the labor for the world's premiere range for testing ICBMs and military space operations support; accessing records and developing a museum regarding the U.S. nuclear weapons and waste programs; and additional environmental programs.

Developing fiscally responsible programs in these regards requires complex decisions and careful planning that is underway.

As I noted earlier, the new Trust Fund contributions will be used to address extraordinary circumstances of exceptional hardship and unmet needs in the case of people in our islands from atolls and islands that face challenges due to location, inadequate housing, lack of arable land, or limited local economic opportunities.

As the chief U.S. negotiator, Special Presidential Envoy Joseph Yun, testified during this Committee's hearing on what became the Compact Act, these are primarily people from "islands that have been affected by nuclear tests."

As he further explained to your counterpart Senate committee, "They are suffering. we've always still felt that there were additional needs . . . which is why" the new contributions were "put into the Trust Fund" to "be used for development, education, environment issues of nuclear atolls" among others, citing "continued radiation and suffering and health effects."

Too many of our people still have losses due to the nuclear weapons testing program and the disposal of radiological waste – including waste from the U.S. So, these individuals will, rightfully, be the beneficiaries of the Trust Fund programs funded by the new contributions.

These programs for our seriously adversely affected people will be consistent with the Compact, as were other U.S. laws enacted after the approval of the Compact that addressed needs arising from the nuclear weapons and waste programs. Such measures are compatible with the Compact,

as Envoy Yun further agreed in his testimony to this Committee. These provisions and their effective implementation are essential for my government's agreement to extend our free association.

In this connection, let me thank the Committee for including in the new Compact Act reiterations of the Compact agreements enabling my Government to seek provisions for damages to property and injuries to individuals from the nuclear programs not known at the time of the Compact, a Changed Circumstances Petition, and requiring the U.S. Government to engage in meaningful consultations on nuclear legacy matters at my Government's request. We are hopeful that this process will result in further addressing the consequences of U.S. nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands

Our governments are close to concluding a new Federal Program and Services Agreement to provide terms for the continuation of U.S. services that are essential to our free association and have been part of the Compact arrangement since its inception. Based on the progress made in negotiations late last week, we hope for a resolution this week. The next step in the process is a revised U.S. proposal.

This would leave one other critical agreement to negotiate: the one needed for our U.S. military veterans to receive health care in our islands or be transported to where they can receive that care. One of the major improvements in the association made by this year's Compact Act is entitling them to this care. It will enable them to return home instead of having to stay in the U.S. or move to Canada or the Philippines. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Honorable Kalani Kaneko, was a U.S. military recruiter in the freely associated states, and looks forward to receiving a Department of Veterans Affairs draft for this agreement.

Other greatly appreciated provisions of the Compact Act restored the eligibility of freely associated state citizens who are in the U.S. due to employment or education for several Federal programs and entitled them to post-secondary educational assistance. Federal agencies are implementing these provisions and must explain the law to State and territorial agencies and post-secondary educational institutions.

The Compact Act also includes very important provisions regarding the U.S. Executive branch's handling of matters concerning the freely associated states. These include restoring an office in the State Department with new staff solely dedicated to addressing issues and fulfilling commitments in our nations' unique partnership, which is the closest relationship possible between sovereign nations; revitalizing the interagency group on these matters; and requiring regular reports to the President of the United States and from the President to the Congress.

I conclude with my initial point: The leaders of this Subcommittee and Committee and your counterparts on both sides of the Capitol from both U.S. political parties did a great service to the Marshall Islands and the other states in free association with the U.S., the Pacific region as a whole, and the United States itself in leading the Congress to work with the Executive branch as one and enact the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024. It will ensure the security of our nations and enable our economies to grow for at least the next 20 years, with provisions for continued benefits on an indefinite basis. Thank you for doing this.