

## **Pacific Youth for TPNW**

Distinguished guests, our matuas, youths and children, Ni Sa Bula Vinaka to everyone

I would like to acknowledge our keynote speaker Hon. Mr. Henry Puna and Madam Rina Keju of RMI for inspiring words.

Thank you MISA and partners for organizing this event. A constant reminder that our ongoing efforts and commitments to a Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific is not over, until the Pacific is truly free from all forms of militarism, imperialism and colonialism in our blue sea of islands.

Today, We Stand before you to honor our shared history of resistance.

Sixty-eight years ago, the United States conducted its most powerful nuclear test ever in its history known as the Bravo bomb.

The possibility of all out nuclear war today is a grave concern to us, as nuclear weapons states continue to enlarge, sustain, modernize and even threaten to use their nuclear arsenals. This week, President Putin announced that he is willing to use nuclear weapons for the Ukraine conflict. To us, "nuclear deterrence" is a fiction. Pacific and Indigenous peoples know all too well the brutal consequences of nuclear war first-hand with 315 nuclear weapons being tested across the Marshall Islands, Australia, Kiribati and Maohi Nui by the US, UK/Australia and France respectively since 1946.

Reflecting on nuclear survivors Remembrance Day, like many Marshallese and Pacific youths of today, we grew up reading and learning the history and stories of the "Bravo" nuclear test, a 15 megaton device detonated on March 1, 1954, at Bikini atoll – which we all know, was 1,000 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb. Despite these underlying facts, the US has not publicly apologized, yet continued to deny responsibility while many Marshallese continue to die due to cancer and other radiation related illnesses over the years.

If nuclear armed states such the US, UK and France are cunningly covering up and publicly denying their abhorrent act of nuclear testing, so too is our collective resistance and resilience for nuclear justice to be strategically holding them accountable to act on the Treaty of Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Now that this Treaty has successfully entered into force, under international law nuclear weapons are now illegal. We need these nuclear weapon states to act especially on Articles 6 and 7 of this Treaty which outlines victim's assistance, environmental remediation and international cooperation and assistance, respectively. In fact, we must support our Pacific Youth representatives to the First Meeting of the States Parties to the TPNW that will be convened in Vienna, June this year.

Today, we also remember the stories of the sacrifice of the People.

The stories of the sacrifice of the people of Marshall Islands, are the same stories we hear little of in Australia, Kiribati, Maohi Nui and even army veterans right here in Fiji. Our Pacific stories of sacrifice were forced to make for what was meant to be (and I quote) "for the good of mankind" (unquote) – which was what the U.S Commodore Ben Wyatt told Bikini islanders when he first approached them about the nuclear testing back in 1946. Shame!

We remember not just stories of cancer, but also stories of babies born with no limbs, of stillbirths and thyroid problems. We remember families starving on outer atolls after being displaced from their own homes. We remember stories of ash that fell from the sky that looked like snow and when it touched their body, it burnt them.

And we also remember the hardship which many families from the four atolls – Bikini, Rongelap, Enewetak and Utrik - and beyond, have had to face when you take into account how strongly our Pacific culture is tied to our islands, and how vulnerable the Marshallese people were to the US imperial force.

Despite all these trials, we also remember how survivors and their families have continued to resist.

And today, we value the advocacy work of survivors, their families and generations coming after them.

Many of our many elders, advocates, activists and supporters for nuclear survivors have sailed the length of the seas to build networks and solidarity. And as we ride each wave of solidarity, we tell our shared history of resistance and a never-ending chain of resilience.

We, the next generation, our generation, will join forces, like those who have ridden the waves before us.

We are humbled to be learning more about this shared history of resistance from our Marshallese, Kiribati, Maohi Nui and Aboriginal brothers and sisters', and we are grateful to learn more about our Pacific history as well.

We are grateful for the collective work by our elders, human rights defenders, civil society organisations and young people in our ongoing efforts and commitments to a nuclear free and independent Pacific.

It is this shared history which gives us the strength that is needed to continue to remember and resist, as we chart our own narrative on the abolition of nuclear weapons and fight for nuclear justice for our Oceania.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, **WE ARE THE PEOPLE WE NEED IN THIS FIGHT! AND WE ARE THE PEOPLE WE ARE WAITING FOR!!!**

Vinaka!