



**Republic of the Marshall Islands  
STATEMENT by Mr. Samuel K. Lanwi, Jr.  
48<sup>th</sup> Human Rights Council  
27 September 2021  
Geneva**

**ID with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples**

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Mme President,

The Republic of the Marshall Islands would like to thank the special rapporteur for his rapport on the rights of the Indigenous peoples in the context of the COVID-19 recovery.

As a result of strong and swift containment measures, the Marshall Islands have thus far remained one of the few countries with no record of local transmission of COVID-19. Moreover, two thirds of the population have already been fully vaccinated. While our local people have not been directly exposed to the effects of COVID-19, the pandemic revealed weaknesses in our healthcare system with a lot of patients being unable to seek medical treatment abroad, as may be necessary from time to time. Our people and especially the older generation suffer serious health defects as a result of the exposure to radiation caused by nuclear testing.

Between 1946 and 1958, 67 nuclear tests were carried out, and to this day, we have alarming rates of morbidity and trauma among our population. The nuclear contamination forced the native population of Enewetak, Bikini, Utrok, and Rongelap Atolls to evacuate and leave their ancestral lands. As indigenous peoples, Marshallese are intimately connected to our land and the forced displacement caused by the nuclear contamination has disconnected us from our lands and our cultural and indigenous way of life.

Protecting the health of the indigenous populations by promoting a healthy environment and adequate healthcare is essential in protecting the traditional knowledge systems that promote environmentally and socially sustainable recovery strategies to overcome adversity such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kommol tata and I thank you.