

STATEMENT BY H. E. PRESIDENT LITOKWA TOMEING

Kwajalein Day 2009

February 9, 2009

Kwajalein Atoll

Yokwe to everyone. Today, we are full of thankfulness for His unceasing protection over each of us and the Republic of the Marshall Islands.

My special recognition to our traditional leaders, Mr. Speaker, Chairman of the Council of Iroij, our spiritual leaders, Ministers, Senators, Ambassador Bishop, Ambassador Linghu, Colonel Clark, distinguished guests, all of you friends and families assembled here this morning, and in particular, the people of the Marshall Islands.

My appreciation to the 4 traditional leaders of Kwajalein and their people, Mayor Lemari and the Kwajalein Atoll Local Government, for the kind invitation to join you in commemorating this important day for Kwajalein. My special appreciation for the warm words of welcome.

It is a great honor to be invited to attend your commemoration of Kwajalein Day. Not the least because it affords me the opportunity to meet again with all my Kwajalein friends, but also because on a day like this, nothing pleases me more than to *bwebwenato* with you about our common past and a vision for the future.

From the time that the people of Kwajalein emerged from the ashes of the battles of Kwajalein in February 1944, you have come to be popularly known by these two designations: fortitude and resilience on the one hand, and generosity and openhandedness on the other.

Amidst numerous uncertainties associated with the initial establishment of the United States military base on your atoll, characterized by movements of people, disruption of your way of life and culture, and deprivations that affected in a substantial manner your social and economic livelihoods, you have remained united, strong and undivided as a people as ever.

Not less than a decade after the battle of Kwajalein, you welcomed with open arms, and with not a trace of animosity, the inevitable expatriation of your fellow Marshallese brothers and sisters from Bikini, Rongelap and Enewetok, having fled to your cultural homeland as victims of the U.S. nuclear testing program.

To date, you are living side by side, not in the hundreds but in the thousands, with Marshallese from every island in our country, each one striving to make a living out of the cash benefits available from USAKA. I can assure you, the people of Kwajalein, that you have a grateful nation and government.

We are here to commemorate Kwajalein Day, a day which has come to signify the beginning of a life transforming experience for the people of Kwajalein. By implication, an experience that constitutes in a major way, the linchpin underscoring our policy with our closest ally, the United States.

As in most life experiences, the past provides the stepping-stone to the future. Now, we cannot recreate the past nor alter the course of history. Neither do we wish to wallow in the mire of gone by days important as they are as part of our history. We can, however, charter a new itinerary into the future. We owe it to our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. And the time to begin is now.

Without a doubt, future generations would like to see a Kwajalein whose education system is the best in the country, a Kwajalein that boasts of the quality of its water and power system. *An emerging modest but vibrant business or commercial sector.* They would want, and they deserve to want so, an infrastructural outlay that provides for adequate and quality housing for everyone; well-lit roads and streets that connect every public center in this Atoll; a major avenue that runs and connects Ebeye to every islet along the length of this beautiful atoll; a dock that is the delight of every arriving visitor. There will be adequate recreational facility in which young people can find the opportunity to build their sporting skills and to challenge each other. To the west, Carlson, Carlos, and others will provide the balance in the development of the Kwajalein necklace.

Having struggled and survived against all odds over the past six decades, my firm belief is that Kwajalein people deserve no less. *When that time comes, how sweet will be the laughter that peals out of your evening bwebwenato, how free and unrestrained as the wind will be your feelings of joy.*

In this connection, I now put forward for your consideration a development policy encompassing the development and the implementation of a comprehensive infra-structural development plan for Kwajalein Atoll. No longer must we rely on the usual piece-meal approach where we have a project here and there, followed perhaps ten to fifteen years later by another project, and so on. Projects in themselves are terminal entities; they are ends in themselves. We need something more comprehensive and integrated; we need a new commencement to Kwajalein; this is imperative.

And we need the United States Government to be an implicit player, an equal partner in this enterprise. The RMI government stands ready to play its part alongside the people of Kwajalein. Much has been said that the U.S purpose in Kwajalein is strictly military; or that for its part, the U.S. provides through the Compact funds for the development of Kwajalein Atoll. No more, no less.

I believe that where genuine development and improvement in the livelihood of a people are matters of serious concern, where the search for new basis for human happiness is imperative, artificial fences and barriers should be set aside. After all, in the new era of President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's reaffirmation of defense, diplomacy, and development as the three pillars underlying the United States foreign policy is a welcomed opportunity.

On December 16 of last year, our government was informed of the approval by the United States Government of the fact that the funds kept in the escrow account would not revert to the U.S Treasury. The reason being that our Government was in a continuing process of working together with Kwajalein landowners to forge an acceptable new land use agreement. I am grateful to the United States for this consideration.

The task of the government is to navigate and harmonize relevant perspectives that bear importance on the subject. Our policy on the subject is consistent with our established position. We will continue to pursue the procurement of an agreement that is *sensible and rational*.

I am pleased to state that we have had several exchanges with landowners since, and by all indications, there is a strong consensus to move the process forward.

I take this opportunity to thank once again the leadership of Kwajalein, and to acknowledge the presence of our foreign dignitaries. As we stride forward, we will face numerous challenges, but with unity and common good will and mutual cooperation, we shall prevail.

Thank you.