

Synopsis of the Inquiry Commission's Report

The work of the Inquiry Commission concentrated on the period of French aerial nuclear testing between 1966 and 1974 which had sanitary, environmental, economic and social consequences in French Polynesia.

By divulging, in their entirety, the “secret” documents of the Defence Ministry dated 1965 to 1967, the report shows incontestable and precise proof of lying by the authorities who conducted the nuclear testing. Although the authorities maintained that the tests were clean and that the radioactive fallout did not affect the population, the report shows the contraire; each one of the tests conducted between 1966 and in 1967 caused radioactive fallout on the islands in French Polynesia.

The metrology system put in place by the Direction of the Center of nuclear experimentation (DIRCEN) was not only insufficient, but also incapable of foretelling the risks of fallout. Contrary to the self satisfaction of the military meteorologists who flaunted their efficacy, the Inquiry Commission estimates that 14 weather stations within a territory of 5 million km² (dimensions of Europe) were ridiculously insufficient.

After having auditioned government ministers, medical experts and health workers, the Inquiry Commission expresses its strong conviction that the aerial nuclear tests had severe consequences for health, not only for those who worked on the test sites, but for the entire population of French Polynesia. The high amount of cancer of the thyroid in Polynesia woman and the worrisome development of acute leukaemia myeloid shows that radioactive fallout is no stranger to these problems.

The report shows that certain promises made by those responsible within the French government in counter party for the implanting of nuclear testing in Polynesia were not kept, and that regardless of considerable money injected by France, conditions for long range development have not been met.

The visits made by the Inquiry Commission, accompanied by experts in radiological analysis (CRIIRAD), to the islands of Mangareva, Tureia and Hao have confirmed that not only the importance of the fallout of past nuclear testing still measurable today, but also confirms the extremely poor condition in which the population and these islands were left by the military once the testing completed.

This report denounces the attitude of the French institutions, who not only tried legal procedures to attempt to annul the work of the Inquiry Commission formed within the rules of a democratic society, but who also refused all requests for information, and who refused to participate in any sort of debate. In addition, after the visits of the Inquiry Commission to Tureia and Mangareva, a delegation of the French Defence ministry went there to put pressure the municipalities and the population to destroy any compromising traces (old “protective buildings”) remaining from the period of the aerial nuclear testing.

The Inquiry Commission recommends that the government of French Polynesia :

- ' take steps to rehabilitate and sanitize the islands visited,
- ' negotiate with France in order that an inventory be made of the radioactive wastes thrown into the sea or into the lagoons and control their future disposal,
- ' create its own laboratory of expert radiology,
- ' establish an archives center and a memory of the nuclear testing,
- ' examine the medical history and create a method of follow-up for those persons who worked on the test sites and the for the populations affected by the fallout from aerial nuclear testing,
- ' negotiate with those responsible within the French government in order to create the economic conditions necessary for a durable development in French Polynesia,
- ' negotiate with France in order to establish a dialogue and to come to an agreement concerning the consequences of 30 years of nuclear testing, in truth and with respect for justice for the victims,
- ' associate the Country for the surveillance of the islands of Mururoa and Fangataufa.

Recommendations

As it concludes its work, the Inquiry Commission of the French Polynesian Assembly wishes to recall the limits that were set on it. Its mandate envisaged an analysis of the consequences only of the period of atmospheric nuclear tests, from 1966 to 1974. The Commission considers its contract fulfilled, although the consequences, still evident years later, have obliged it to take into account also the health, economic, and social realities of present-day Polynesia.

Some may wonder why no chapter of this report is devoted to the Moruroa and Fangataufa atolls. This is not an oversight but is intended to point out that the nuclear tests carried out on these two Polynesian atolls have been, from the beginning in 1966 up to the present, forbidden to the investigation of elected Polynesian officials. As we have reported in the chapter on the elected officials, the few who have gone to the sites at the invitation of the Armed Forces have had no means of checking or verifying the statements of their military hosts. For its part, the Inquiry Commission has requested of the Ministry of Defense that a visit to the nuclear atolls be organized. We have had neither acknowledgment nor response from this ministry. In this situation, the Commission considered silence to be necessary.

The recommendations of the Inquiry Commission that are to be validated by the French Polynesian Assembly are addressed mainly to the government of the Country, which has established an organism to pursue this matter: the "Orientation Council for follow-up on the consequences of nuclear tests on the health of people and on the environment." It will be up to the government to accept and carry out the recommendations of the Commission.

The Commission wishes, however, to make a prior recommendation that it considers necessary so that the Country may have more complete control of its own analysis of the consequences of the total program of nuclear tests.

The Inquiry Commission recommends that the Orientation Council carry out its own investigation into the consequences on health and on the environment of underground tests, which are far from negligible and which are a long-term concern.

I. Sites to be cleaned up and rehabilitated

The Inquiry Commission went to the islands and atolls of Gambier, Tureia, and Hao. It found that the CEP, during the period of atmospheric tests, permanently disturbed the environment and the daily life of the people. Large areas remain to be rehabilitated and cleaned up, in particular on Hao, Tureia and Mangareva. The future of certain military buildings (shelters, blockhouses . . .) remains to be studied. Uncertainties remain as to the radiological condition of certain sites that one now knows may have been contaminated during atmospheric testing.

The Inquiry Commission proposes that complementary investigations of radioactivity be programmed, as the preliminary expert examination by the CRIIRAD recommends.

1.1 The Inquiry Commission proposes that the government of French Polynesia entrust to the "Orientation Council for follow-up on the consequences of nuclear tests" the responsibility for constituting a working group on "sites to be decontaminated and rehabilitated."

The Inquiry Commission proposes that the method used rely on two principles: transparency and dialog with the partners concerned, that is to say the private owners, municipalities, the Country and the State.

As needed, a mediator will be designated to resolve disputed questions.

II. Waste and contaminated materials

The Commission has been informed by many sources (witnesses, documents, photographs . . .) about the discharge of contaminated materials in the ocean (or in lagoons).

The transparency proclaimed by the Ministry of Defense and the application of the principal of precaution for future generations require that information on these discharges be communicated to the Country.

II.1 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that discussions with the State be entered into to put into effect the following measures:

--An inventory of radioactive waste discarded in the ocean: nature of the waste, date of discharge, place of discharge

--Cartography of the sites where "Vautour" airplanes were discarded in the ocean in 1974

--Cartography of other discharge sites in the sea or lagoons

The destination and the management of radioactive waste that could be recovered will be studied jointly by a State-Country working group.

III. A radiological analysis laboratory for the Country

The information collected by the Inquiry Commission in regard to the radiological status of certain zones or atolls used for the nuclear testing program will necessitate that the sampling and analysis be carried out under the authority of the Country. The experience of the Inquiry Commission has shown that the collaboration of similar services of the State (LESE for example) is not assured.

III.1. The Inquiry Commission recommends that a radiological analysis laboratory be created and put in the service of the Country. The laboratory project attached to these recommendations could serve as a starting point for its establishment.

IV. Center for archives and the memory of the nuclear tests

In the course of its work, the Inquiry Commission ran into difficulty in obtaining the information and the numerous documents that relate to the nuclear tests carried out in the Country. The history of this period and its consequences for the future of the Country is the other hand greatly misunderstood by the Polynesians themselves and in particular by the young generations.

IV.1 The Inquiry Commission recommends that there be created, in the framework of the institutions of the Country, an institute that is a center for archives and the memory of the nuclear tests and is at the disposal of the public.

This institute could take on an international character by enlarging its subject to the nuclear tests carried out by the major powers, notably in the Pacific.

This institute will be provided with buildings, personnel, and a budget. It will collect all the available documentation, written and audiovisual, on the nuclear tests.

This institute will have the capability of presenting documents, expositions at the disposal of all Polynesians and also of tourists visiting the country.

IV.2 The Inquiry Commission recommends that an independent commission of historians be established for the study of the nuclear test period in Polynesia.

IV.3 The Inquiry Commission recommends that the memory of all the Polynesians who have worked at the nuclear test sites since 1963 be preserved and especially of all those who have already died. For this purpose, the Inquiry Commission asks mayors and families in the Country to make a list of all the former workers who have died and to communicate this information to the Orientation Council. The Inquiry Commission approves of the project of a memorial on nuclear testing proposed by Moruroa e tatou and recommends that the government of the Country contribute to its realization.

V. Medical Monitoring

During its hearings and its visits to Mangareva, Tureia and Hao, the Inquiry Commission was confronted with numerous health questions from the people to whom it spoke. The Inquiry Commission recalls its “personal conviction” that the nuclear tests have affected public health throughout French Polynesia.

V.1 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that it establish a “unit for medical-social monitoring” of the populations that were “nearest” to the nuclear tests, former workers at Moruroa and their families, populations of the islands and atolls near to Moruroa . The composition and the tasks of that “unit for a socio-medical follow up” will be studied by the “Orientation Council.”

V.2 The Inquiry Commission recommends the financing of specific scientific studies concerning people and communities considered to be most affected by nuclear risks, notably populations of the islands and atolls “under the wind of the aerial tests” and former workers at Moruroa and their families. “Basic” studies on the follow up of these populations could be carried out with the help of the University in order to permit epidemiologists and researchers to build their research on serious sociological and anthropological bases.

In this framework, the Inquiry Commission recommends the creation of a DNA bank in Polynesia under the responsibility of the Blood Transfusion Center.

V.3 The Inquiry Commission recommends that scientific studies on illnesses considered to be induced by radioactivity be carried out and in particular that funding and personnel be given to the Country’s Cancer Registry.

V.4 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that it encourage the State to place on the parliamentary agenda legislation that recognizes the “principal of presumption” according to the methods accepted by the Inquiry Commission in the chapter on health.

VI. Economic Development

The thirty years of the CEP have not truly contributed to the sustainable development of French Polynesia. Heavy infrastructure was promised to the elected representatives of the Polynesians in return for the problems caused by the establishment of the CEP. These promises have not been kept.

VI.1 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government that it enter into discussion with the State on the creation and financing of infrastructure that would give Polynesia the means for sustainable development, absolute priority being given to the highway crossing Tahiti.

VI.2 The Inquiry Commission recommends that the government enter into discussion with the Social Protection Office, the ministries concerned, and the association Moruroa e Tatou to resolve the possible economic damage suffered by former workers at Moruroa (annuities not taken into account in the calculation of pensions, recognition of professional illnesses . . .).

VII Relations with the State

Ten years after the end of testing, the Inquiry Commission believes that disputes between the State and the Country on the consequences of nuclear testing must be settled. For their part, elected officials and the government of the Country have put in place the means to constitute their own expertise on thirty years of nuclear testing, which remains to be exercised.

VII.1 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that it solicit the authorities of the State in order that an authority with equal representation on both sides may be established for dialog and discussion on the nuclear tests.

VII.2 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that it asks officials of the State to communicate all the reports on fallout from aerial tests during the 1966-1974 period.

VII.3 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that a renegotiation of the “development plan” in compensation for the nuclear tests be established to permit the financing of the recommendations of the Inquiry Commission.

VII.4 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that it negotiate with the State the participation of experts and of people designated by the Country in the monitoring of the atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa. The laboratory for radiological analysis created by the Country will be associated with the surveillance system at present managed only by the Ministry of Defense.

VII. 5 The Inquiry Commission recommends to the government of the Country that discussion with the State on the revision of the legal status of the atolls of Moruroa and Fangataufa be undertaken.