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*A US nuclear weapon is detonated at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in 1946. (Image has been colorized.) Photo: US Government via International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons on Flickr (Public Domain).*

**The tiny Pacific state of the Marshall Islands has given oral evidence to the International Court of Justice against all nuclear armed states for failing to pursue disarmament. The UK, India and Pakistan were present to deny the charges, but the US, Russia, France, China, Israel and North Korea have denied the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction.**

In April 2014, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, a tiny island country part of Micronesia, filed [groundbreaking lawsuits](#) to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) [against the world's nine nuclear-armed countries](#)

Now, almost two years later, the ICJ has heard preliminary oral arguments in three of the cases.

Between 1946 and 1958, 67 nuclear tests were conducted by the US in the Marshalls, making it one of the most contaminated places in the world. With a population of less than 70,000, the Islanders suffered greatly from the impact of radiation; the land and sea poisoned as well.

In 1985, the [Greenpeace ship, Rainbow Warrior](#) helped to relocate the residents of one of the most severely impacted islands, Rongelap, after it became clear that high levels of radioactive contamination made most of the island unfit for habitation.

This month, between 7-16 March 2016, the ICJ's panel of 16 judges heard oral arguments by the Marshall Islands and three respondent nations - the United Kingdom, India and Pakistan.

Tony de Brum, Co-Agent of the Marshall Islands and former Foreign Minister, reminded the Court why the Marshall Islands, a small nation with limited resources that is seriously threatened by climate change, would bring these lawsuits against some of the world's most militarily powerful nations.

### **1,000 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb**

During the second day of the hearings, he recalled one occasion in 1954 of the testing of a thermonuclear bomb that was 1,000 times the strength of the Hiroshima bomb. When the explosion occurred, it began to rain radioactive fallout at Rongelap. Within hours, the atoll was covered with a fine, white, powder-like substance.

*"No one knew it was radioactive fallout", said Mr de Brum. "The children thought it was snow. And the children played in the snow. And they ate it."*

The other six nuclear-armed nations - the United States, Russia, France, China, Israel and North Korea - do not accept the compulsory jurisdiction of the ICJ and therefore, would not appear before the Court.

The Marshall Islands contends that the UK, India and Pakistan are in breach of existing international law, which requires good faith negotiations for an end to the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament.

The Court is expected to deliver its decision in approximately six months from now. Greenpeace will continue to stand with the people of the Marshall Islands in their fight to rid the world of nuclear weapons.

### Daily summaries from the ICJ

[Preview: The Marshall Islands at the ICJ](#) - *"We are, basically, asking the Court to tell the respondent states to live up to their obligations under international law and to conduct negotiations leading to the required result: nuclear disarmament in all its aspects"* , said Phon van den Biesen, Co-Agent for the RMI and attorney at law in Amsterdam, who is leading the International Legal Team.

[Day One: Marshall Islands Shines Against India](#) - It was an historic day at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), as oral arguments in the first-ever contentious cases on nuclear disarmament began at the ICJ. The Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) argued strongly in favor of the ICJ holding jurisdiction in the case that the RMI has brought against India.

[Day Two: Where Is Pakistan?](#) - Pakistan chose not to participate in oral arguments at the case against it at the International Court of Justice. On 8 March, the Marshall Islands presented its case to the Court. Marshall Islands Co-Agent Tony de Brum recounted the only "snowfall" the Marshall Islands had ever experienced - the radioactive fallout after the 1 March 1954 Castle Bravo nuclear test.

[Day Three: What Is the Sound of One Hand Clapping?](#) - In its opening pleadings on 9 March, Sir Daniel Bethlehem told the Court, *"The United Kingdom had thought, although naively, as it now appears, that we had a strong record on nuclear disarmament."*

[Day Four: Aspirational Rhetoric vs. Real Actions](#) - India pleaded to the Court on 10 March that it is, in fact, deeply committed to nuclear disarmament because it consistently votes in favor of various disarmament resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly. Its active involvement in the nuclear arms race, though, tells a different story.

[Day Five: Everybody's Doing It](#) - In the Marshall Islands' first session of oral arguments in the case against the United Kingdom on 11 March, Phon van den Biesen, Co-Agent of the Marshall Islands, outlined how the UK is not only not engaged in nuclear disarmament negotiations, but *"on the contrary it is and continues to be opposed to such negotiations."*

[Day Six \(Part One\): Contempt of Court](#) - In the Marshall Islands' final round of oral argument against India on 14 March, Phon van den Biesen told the Court that India's active participation in the nuclear arms race - including a test-launch of its K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missile on 7 March (the first day of the ICJ hearings) - could be described as *"contempt of court."*

[Day Six \(Part Two\): Appealing to Sentiment](#) - In the United Kingdom's final round of oral argument on 14 March, Sir David Bethlehem told the Court that the Marshall Islands was simply *"appealing to sentiment"* by recounting its experience as a test site for 67 US nuclear weapons tests, and that the cases should be dismissed.

[Day Seven: Making a Big Fuss](#) - In closing arguments at the International Court of Justice, RMI Co-Agent Tony de Brum asked the Court *"to adjudge and declare that the Court has jurisdiction over the claims of the Marshall Islands submitted in its Application of 24 April 2014; and to adjudge and declare that the Marshall Islands' claims are admissible."*