

No Way Back

With tears streaming down my face I see my homeland recede into the hazy distance as my rescue ship heads for Darwin. All that remains of my lifelong home is a narrow spit of wooded land soon to disappear under the waves. Today is the first and last time I will leave my coral island paradise.

My name is Ahomana and I am a proud Marshall islander. I was born at the beginning of this second millennium seventy years ago. In my mother tongue Ahomana means thunder and that is what suffuses my very soul today. I am angry beyond words and curse the nations of the world for allowing this catastrophe to happen. I denounce the United States of America because it bears most culpability for the destruction of my country of sixty thousand people. We have been doubly afflicted by our forced association with this super-power. Its use of our Bikini and Eniwatok atolls for nuclear testing left a horrifying legacy. Radio-active fallout caused a massive increase in cancers and birth defects among my people. My own mother gave birth to two so called 'jellyfish babies,' a disturbingly common abnormality of babies born with transparent skin and no bones, unable to survive outside the womb for more than a few days.

So when global warming accelerated what did America decide to do? It shamefully elected to protect only one of the twenty-nine inhabited atolls in our archipelago. It was no surprise that the chosen island, Kwajalein, was where it had its military base. The US spent billions of dollars raising the land on that island and constructing coastal defences to combat the inexorable rise in sea levels caused by global warming. It left us to try to raise the funds to do the same on the other islands. As the global climate crisis intensified it was impossible to get the aid we so desperately needed as the developed countries zealously guarded their own resources. By 2050 warming had already exceeded 2.5 degrees Celsius and many Pacific island nations were inundated with hundreds of thousands of their inhabitants being evacuated or perishing. The Maldives was the first to succumb being on average no more than four feet above sea level. The entire population of half a million souls was forced to flee or drown. Many without the resources to pay the extortionate air fares or for the expensive berths on ships paid instead with their lives.

Many other nations in the Pacific and Indian oceans experienced if not total submersion then enormous loss of coastal land. Fiji, the Solomon Islands, Micronesia and the Seychelles lost huge swathes of territory. Around the world nations with low-lying coastlines were engulfed. The Netherlands disappeared and in Bangladesh and Vietnam countless millions drowned after storm surges. The resulting social and economic dystopia caused the total collapse of the old world order. Many millions of refugees died vainly trying to breach the borders of unreceptive countries. Isolationism not collectivism reigned. Wars proliferated over land and food and water supplies. Democracies crumbled to be replaced by hard-line military dictatorships.

I am glad I will not have long to live in exile on this desecrated planet.