

# Transforming Our Island

Hafa adai, Mr. Chairman Marty Natalegawa and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Sabina Flores Perez. I speak to you today as an indigenous Chamorro woman from the island of Guam. I come from a people and civilization that has been in the making for over 4000 years and has survived nearly 500 hundred years of uninterrupted colonization. I am honored to speak in solidarity with those who have appealed to the United Nations on behalf of Guam and Chamorro human rights, inclusive of the most recent testimony by Hope Alvarez Cristobal at the 2008 Pacific Regional Seminar in Bandung, Indonesia.

As part of my testimony, I would like to acknowledge the depth and detail of Mrs. Cristobal's statement by resubmitting the written testimony as an addendum, to highlight key points in her testimony and to reinforce previous recommendations.

Since my testimony at the UN Special Committee of 24 in 2007, I have found that the Working Paper on Guam, as it is written, is inadequate in that 1) it fails to record that the Administering Power's plans for intensified militarization of the non-self governing territory of Guam is in violation of the United Nations Charter, UN resolution 1514, UN Resolution 1541 and UN Resolution A/56/61 on the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, and 2) it does not provide a complete picture of the economic, social, environmental crisis in connection with the huge power imbalance between the Guam and the Administering Power, the United States of America.

The indigenous people of Guam, which has been objectified as a strategic location and has played and continues to play a crucial role in the overall US national economic and military defense scheme<sup>1</sup> without our consent or consultation, are experiencing numerous threats to human rights of self-determination at multiple levels, and now more than ever in the face of this largest, most violent wave of US militarization of our island home. Furthermore, the future of the indigenous people of Guam is being over-determined by US economic and military interests as opposed to self-determined. This is evident in the current hyper-militarization of our island home.

The current plan of intensified militarization, slated to cost US \$15 billion, was developed without the informed consent and against the will of the Chamorro people. It will further transform our island home into a forward base with the following developments, among many: the establishment of a Global Strike Force, the refurbishing of Naval Base Guam to enhance its capacity to port nuclear air craft carriers, the construction of an Army Base to serve as Patriot Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) task force, and the planned construction of a highway to be used solely for military purposes. The road will cut through the island to connect the two biggest military bases, Anderson Air Force Base in the North and Naval Station in the South, making it easier and faster for the United States to transport weapons throughout the island.

It will include the scheduled initial transfer this year of 8,000 US Marines and their 9,000 dependents from Okinawa. The projected total influx of 35,000 military personnel, their families and support staff from other parts of Asia will result in a 23%

population increase over the next six and a half years compared to the US population growth of 5 percent from 2000 to 2005. With the current population at 167,000, the influx will radically alter the demography of the island, further marginalizing Chamorros with absolutely no guarantees that our right to self-determination will remain intact. This military influx threatens our inalienable right to self-determination. Instructive here is the statement made by the Deputy Commander of US Pacific Command, US Air Force Lieutenant General Daniel P. Leaf in his visit to Guam in September 2006 who stated that US troops have a US Constitutional Right to participate in Guam's local elections. If this is an example of US policy regarding local governance, then Chamorro self-determination is gravely endangered. Moreover, this military buildup of Guam goes against the Administering Power's moral and legal obligations to protect our human rights.

The massive militarization of our island home undermining our human right to self-determination before we even had the chance to vote on a political status is being coupled with an aggressive privatization agenda being pushed by the local Chamber of Commerce, which is dominated by US Statesiders. This wresting from public control of our natural and economic resources is no doubt endangering yet more of our human rights. Our water, power, and port through which flows 90 percent of our food, are under relentless attack of being privatized, all within the trust of the Administering Power. All on the US watch.

The survival of our people is at stake given our designated role as the "tip of the spear" and the "unsinkable carrier" of the US. Our livelihood has been impacted with longterm, persistent and cumulative exposure of military contamination of all kinds. At least 78 toxic military sites have been identified for cleanup from past military activities, countless others are hidden, some have been handed over to the local government to clean up, such as the Ordot Dump, which was created by the US Navy and which has been used by the local population, and new ones are being created, with increased military trainings both on land and off-shore.

Our water resources in close proximity of both military bases in Guam are seriously compromised by our Administering Power. Andersen Air Force Base sits atop the Northern aquifer, which supplies 75 percent of the island's drinking water. The Navy Base contains Fena Lake, which supplies some of the southern residents. We stand to lose a huge water resource in the southern village of Inarajan to the development of a new landfill, one that our local government is being pressured to open in time when both military bases' landfills (both Navy and Air Force) are scheduled to close. The opening of a new landfill in Inarajan and the concomitant closure of the Ordot dump is one example of how military planners are using federal legal action to create infrastructure to support the military influx, at the expense of the local population.

The economic situation is dire. The military influx, which was promoted as the panacea to our local government's economic woes, is exacerbating living conditions for many residents, 25% of whom are below the federally defined poverty level. Rent and housing prices have skyrocketed beyond the reach of many residents who have fixed or low incomes. Our people are struggling to make ends meet, and many are fleeing.

Chamorros are at a serious risk of losing control of our homeland. The high speculative market is enticing families with significant land holdings to cash in. Large tracts of

lands have been sold and developed into high-end condos. A single transaction had 1% of the island sold to a private company. Green areas and significant ancestral burials are being bulldozed and developed for housing and tourism in anticipation of the military influx. The US Department of the Interior has taken an active role in promoting foreign businesses to come to Guam to build up the accompanying military-based economy.

Let's be clear: The massive militarization is not developed in the best interests or with the consent of the indigenous people of Guam and is in violation of the Administering Power's "sacred trust obligation" under Article 73 of the UN Charter to ensure our transition from colonization to freedom. This military buildup will forever secure the political and cultural dispossession of the indigenous Chamoru people of Guam.

The level and grossness of the infraction indicates that we as a people have no recourse available to us within the framework of the US laws and its relationship to Guam. Through the 1950 Organic Act that was passed unilaterally by the US Congress, Chamorros were granted citizenship without political representation, which exists till this day. On Guam, Chamorros cannot vote for the US President, who is the Commander-in-Chief, who in turn determines the island's fate in the name of "national defense." The US Congress has the power to pass laws unilaterally, such as the Title VII of the Consolidated Natural Resources Act of 2008, which has expedited the military buildup of Guam by removing the cap of H1 visas in order to flood the island with workers for companies contracted to facilitate the military buildup of Guam. Time and again, we are reminded that we are less than humans and mere objects, possessions by those policy makers and military leaders of the Administering Power.

*As Captain Douglas bluntly stated: "People on Guam seem to forget that they are a possession, and not an equal partner...If California says that they want to do this, it is like my wife saying that she wants to move here or there: I'll have to respect her wish and at least discuss it with her. If Guam says they want to do this or that, it is as if this cup here [he pointed at his coffee mug] expresses a wish: the answer will be, you belong to me and I can do with you as best I please."*

Furthermore, it is the exploitation of our political status and lack of political development that enables the Administering Power's military control of our island home and the recent hyper-militarization at huge cost to the Chamorro people and our only homeland.

We Chamorros, as the indigenous people of Guam ask for your assistance for relief from the violence that this intensified militarization brings. We as humans have the power to heal ourselves from the scars of colonialism, but we cannot do this alone, nor should we be asked to. The time to act is now. The Special Committee of 24 must live up to its mandate and end its current policy of "colonial accommodation."

I call upon the Members of the Committee, in accordance with the United Nations Charter and General Assembly Resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541, amongst other mandates and actions on behalf of decolonization, to take the following actions:

- 1) Reaffirm and give top priority to the inalienable right of the Chamorro people of Guam to self-determination in view of the Administering Power's intensified militarization planned within a window of 2-4 years,
- 2) Work with the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to report on the decolonization process at its eighth session in 2009, with a main objective of identifying deficiencies of the current UN-endorsed decolonization regime for the people of Guam as well as inter-UN-agency strategies to better facilitate decolonization,
- 3) Denounce the Administering Power's hyper-militarization of the non-self-governing territory of Guam as a breach of trust on the part of the Administering Power with regard to its obligation to safeguard the human right to self-determination of the Chamoru people of Guam,
- 4) Implement measures to increase the coordination of UN agencies toward decolonization and provide corrective measures against the current and cumulative impacts of colonization and militarization. *Si Yu'os Ma'ase*/Thank you Mr. Chairman and distinguished members for your attention and consideration.

*– Sinangan Si Sabina Flores Perez  
UN Special Committee of 24*