

The Sacred Center

My name is Tiffany Rose Naputi Lacsado, I am a member of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF) an NGO, whose headquarters are located in Washington DC. Our mission is to strengthen communities through the perspectives, voices and political participation of Asian Pacific American women on the local, national and international level. Our choir is made up of pan Asian and pan Pacific Islander voices from the Asian Pacific Islander Diaspora.

As a NAPAWF member, I stand before you a Chamoru woman, born on the island of Guam and raised in the continental United States . I am a woman living on the periphery of the dire situation on Guam but feel its effects ripple throughout the Chamoru diaspora. I believe that it is important for this committee to not only hear the indigenous voices of people who have lived their formative years in the Pacific but to also see the face and hear the voice of a Chamoru who is displaced and are far from home.

As you have heard from other sons and daughters of Guam, I am here to speak to you about how colonialism, US cultural hegemony and its offspring the military industrial complex ripples throughout the Chamoru diaspora.

Borrowing from our sister American colony in the South Pacific—Samoa, there is an ancestral belief system that is based on a “Sacred Center.” Samoa means “sacred center.” It is the belief that all things begin and lead back to a “sacred center”. This belief is shared throughout the Pacific and is based on a Pacific Epistemology. It is a belief that like a ring has no beginning and no ending but at its core lays the respect for the land and the family unit. As US cultural hegemony and the military taint the land, the bloodline, the mind and the spirit of Chamorus and other Pacific Islanders, we become increasingly disconnected and displaced from that “sacred center”.

The impact of US cultural hegemony on my people is that it does not allow for the survival of Chamoru language and traditions. I and others in my generation and parent's generation on Guam and in the diaspora are living with the legacy of pillage that our parents and grandparents faced post WWII. That legacy robbed us of our most basic right, access to our language and our traditions. Our language and traditions are on the verge of extinction with the helping hand of US cultural hegemony. My Aunts and Uncles talk story of how as children in the 50's and 60's if they spoke Chamoru in school their knuckles would get rapped from a ruler and were made to feel ashamed to speak the Chamoru language on their own island.

Others in my generation live with the effects of this legacy because regardless of if you are living on Guam or in the continental United States , a good majority of my generation and the generation before me cannot speak Chamoru. When we have asked the *manamko*—our elders, who are displaced and in the diaspora, to be intentional about teaching us the language and culture, they truly believe that it is not in their best interest to teach and not in our best interest to learn. “Better to be completely American, nai!” is the response I have gotten. For our elders who are committed to passing down our language and traditions, the children often shy away

from accepting those gifts. If our elders feel that it is not in their best interest to teach us our language and traditions and if the elders who are committed to teaching have no willing students, then what happens to us and future generations when they die and with them our language and traditions? How are we to stay connected to that “sacred center”?

Committee members, know that Guam suffers from a military industrial complex, it is the same military industrial complex that American President Dwight Eisenhower forewarns the American public to “Guard against” in 1961. In the dictionary the definition for military industrial-complex makes no reference to the human impact it causes. For Guam and the Chamoru people it is the spawn of US colonialism and it will only stunt our psychosocial growth towards self-determination, furthermore, with the helping hand of US cultural hegemony it erases from our collective memory that the US by signing the United Nations charter is obligated by international law to ensuring our self-determination and decolonization. We have also forgotten that we deserve and are entitled to a right to choose a society that will serve no other interests but our own. The amnesia regarding our political status also contributes to further disconnect and displace us from that “sacred center”.

The US military industrial complex is what created the Chamoru diaspora I speak from. In my family, the psychosocial impact of the military is nothing less than total dependence. It plagues our land, bloodline, mind and spirit. In the minds of my family there is no other option but a militarized option. The popular belief is that only way to survive on the island or to get off the island is via the military. This belief disproportionately affects young people. Through the lens of the young we see that the only way to leave the island and explore the world past Guam ’s shores is to not go directly to college but to join the military. In the name of peace, my family and countless young people I call for a moratorium on Guam ’s absolute military dependence. I am committed to educating my people towards their own liberation and creating alternative opportunities to our economic dependence on the military. I also call on the United Nations to become a more active participant in our decolonization process.

In my family the word demilitarization is offensive and anyone who stands in support of demilitarization is ostracized and considered the enemy. I am considered the enemy.

My family, the Naputi’s, have invested their land, their blood, their mind, their spirit, fellow family members and the little time they have on this planet in the US military. The military on the most basic level is how we survive in the diaspora and on our island. Those who cannot rise with the tide of military are forced to leave the island and make a way of life elsewhere usually somewhere near family. Most likely their new home will be near another military base.

My family cannot envision life on Guam without the military for economic and security reasons. Our culture is a militarized culture and even on our own land and in our families we are disconnected from that “sacred center” and it tears us apart not only geographically but spiritually as well. Our language is dying, our traditions will die with it and the world will be filled with disconnected and displaced Chamorus like me.

The sum effect of US cultural hegemony and militarism is to permanently deny Chamoru people our long and uphill struggle for self-determination. The military buildup we speak of today, and the scheduled relocation of tens of thousands of additional US military personnel, is the latest act of negligence and abuse on the part of the US as the official Administering Power of Guam. The General Assembly must pass a resolution condemning this mass military relocation and buildup of Guam. The Fourth Committee must take direct action to stop the military occupation of Guam . The Committee can begin this process by directly engaging the Guam Commission on Decolonization office and grassroots groups including the Chamoru Nation and the Organization of People for Indigenous Rights.

So I stand before you, a Chamoru woman, born on the island of Guam, raised in the continental US and currently living in Northern California. I am disconnected and displaced from that “sacred center” and am doing everything in my power to return to it. I challenge you to see my face, hear my voice and know that my testimony adds to the choir of voices that you listen to today as a voice from the Chamoru diaspora.

*– Sinangan Si Tiffany Naputi Lacsado
Ginnen The National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum (NAPAWF)*