

# Contamination of the Pacific

Hafa Adai distinguished members of the United Nations Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) and Chairman, H.E. Mr. Jorge Arguello,

My name is Craig Santos Perez and I'm a poet and native son of Guam. I represent the Guahan Indigenous Collective, a grassroots organization committed to keeping Chamoru culture alive through public education and artistic expression. I'm here to testify about the fangs of militarization and colonialism destroying the Chamoru people of Guam.

These fangs dig deep. During and immediately after World War II, brown tree snakes invaded Guam as stowaways on US naval cargo ships. By 1968, the snakes colonized the entire island, their population reaching a density of 13,000 per square mile. As a result, Guam's seabirds, 10 of 13 endemic species of forest birds, 2 of 3 native mammals, and 6 of 10 native species of lizards have all gone extinct.

The US plans to introduce—this time intentionally—a more familiar breed of predators to Guam: an estimated 19,000 military personnel and 20,000 of their dependents, along with numerous overseas businesses and 20,000 contract workers to support the military build-up. Add this to the 14,000 military personnel already on Guam, and that's a combined total of 73,000—outnumbering the entire Chamoru population on Guam, which is roughly 62,900.

This hyper-militarization poses grave implications for our human right to self-determination because the US currently asserts that its citizens—this transient population—have a “constitutional” right to vote in our plebiscite.

Furthermore, this hyper-militarization (continuing a long history of militarization on Guam), will severely devastate our environmental, social, physical and cultural health. Since World War II, military dumping and nuclear testing has contaminated the Pacific with PCBs and radiation. In addition, PCBs and other military toxic waste have choked the breath out of the largest barrier reef system of Guam, poisoning fish and fishing grounds. As recently as July of this year, the USS Houston, a US Navy nuclear submarine home-ported on Guam, leaked trace amounts of radioactivity into our waters.

The violation doesn't end on our shores; the military also occupies and infects our ancestral lands. Currently, the US military occupies a third of the island, and the impending build-up has interrupted the return of federal excess lands to original land-owners and threatens to claim more lands for live fire training. Not only has the US continued to deprive us of our right to land, but they also pollute these lands. Eighty contaminated military dumpsites still exist on Guam. The now civilian Ordot landfill (a former World War II military dumpsite) contains 17 toxic chemicals, including arsenic, lead, chromium, PCBs, and cyanide. The same 17 pollutants are also found in the landfills located over the island's aquifer at Andersen Air Force Base in northern Guam.

While the US military erodes the integrity of our land, expectations from the military build-up have more than doubled real estate prices and tripled home costs. Coupled with a struggling economy and rising living costs, many landless Chamorus have been economically coerced to leave the island and others have become homeless. Even our ancestors are being affected: a \$30 million expansion of the Guam Hotel Okura has excavated an ancient Chamoru cemetery. More than 300 ancestral remains have already been unearthed.

While new condominiums, hotels, and high-end homes are beginning to rise, the sky is falling. In July 2007, an F/A-18C Hornet crashed in the waters around Guam during a training mission. This year, at least 3 other military aircrafts have crashed in or near Andersen Air Force Base.

US colonial presence has not only damaged our bodies of land and water, but it's deteriorated our physical bodies as well. The military used Guam as a decontamination site during its nuclear testing in the 1970s, which resulted in massive radiation and agent orange and purple exposure. High incidences of various kinds of cancer and neurodegenerative diseases, such amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, Parkinsonism-dementia, and Lytico-Bodig plague the Chamoru people. Toxic chemicals have snaked bloodstream, causing multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, renal dysfunction, cardiovascular disease, liver dysfunction, deafness, blindness, epilepsy, seizures, arthritis, anemia, stillbirths, and infertility—all of which Chamorus disproportionately suffer. And because our mental health is woven to our physical health, Chamorus suffer dramatically high rates of incarceration, family violence, substance abuse, teenage suicides, and school drop-outs. The presence of the US military has choked the breath out of our daughters and sons, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers.

Like the last Totot (Marianas Fruit-dove) on Guam being slowly swallowed by the brown tree snake, Chamorus are being disappeared. Diseases have killed most of our elders: only five percent of the island is over the age of 65. Young Chamorus are joining the US military and dying in America's wars at alarming rates. In 2005, four of the US Army's top twelve recruitment producers were based on Guam. In 2007, Guam ranked No. 1 for recruiting success in the Army National Guard's assessment of 54 states and territories. In the current war on terror, our killed-in-action rate is now five times the US national average. Since the war on terror began in 2001, 29 sons of Micronesia have died—17 of them from Guam.

In terms of population, Chamorus constituted 45 percent of Guam's population in 1980; in 1990, 43 percent; in 2000, 37 percent. In devastating contrast, the planned influx of non-Chamorus will increase Guam's overall population by about 30 percent, causing a 20-year population growth over the next five years. History repeats itself: more foreign snakes, fewer native birds.

The US Pentagon is currently conducting an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/ Overseas Environmental Impact Statement (OEIS) for the build-up. However, the study is problematic in a number of ways, including the rushed speed of the study (a mere 2 years, with a 2009 completion date); the framing of the "impact" (which excludes many social, health, and environmental issues and focuses on economic "positives"); and the research methods (which relies on outdated data sets and "experts" composed mainly

of the political and business elite). These Impact Statements are only invested in legitimizing the military buildup.

The door of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will not be open for much longer. And even though powerful snakes block our passage, we are willing to struggle for our rights—but we need your help.

The Fourth Committee must give top priority to the fulfillment of our inalienable right to self-determination, as affirmed by General Resolutions 1514 and 1541, and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The Fourth Committee must immediately enact the process of decolonization for Guam in lieu of the severe, irreversible impact of US militarization. This process must include a fully funded and far-reaching education campaign informing all Chamorus from Guam of our right to self-determination and decolonization options.

The Fourth Committee must thoroughly investigate the administering power's non-compliance with its treaty obligations under the Charter of the United Nations to promote economic, social, and cultural well-being on Guam

The Fourth Committee must send UN representatives to the island within the next six months to assess the implications of US militarization plans on the decolonization of Guam, and the human rights implications of the cumulative impacts of the US military's presence on our island. The Fourth Committee must contact Guam leaders and delegates who have presented testimony before this body, and UN funding must be allocated immediately to advance this study. We cannot rely on faulty impact studies conducted by the US, which are used to justify their actions rather than truly assess their impacts on our island.

Finally, the Fourth Committee must comply with the recommendations of other UN agencies, especially the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which recently requested an expert seminar be held to examine the impact of the UN decolonization process on indigenous peoples of the Non Self-Governing Territories. This committee must prioritize collaboration with Chamoru organizations and experts, such as I Nasion Chamoru, Famoksaiyan, Fuetsan Famalao'an and all those who have provided testimony in the past two decades.

Thank you for listening, and I hope we can continue to work towards achieving decolonization and self-determination for the indigenous Chamoru people of Guam.

*– Sinangan Si Craig Santos Perez  
Guahan Indigenous Collective*