

Storm of US Militarization

Ati addeng-miyo your Excellencies. My name is Julian Aguon and I appear before you with the full support and blessings of my elders. I address you on behalf of the indigenous Chamoru people of Guam, an endangered people now being rushed toward full-blown extinction.

In 2008, the indigenous Chamoru people of Guam brace ourselves for a storm of US militarization so enormous in scope, so volatile in nature, so irreversible in consequence. US military realignment in the Asia-Pacific region seeks to homeport sixty percent of its Pacific Fleet in and around our ancient archipelago. With no input from the indigenous Chamoru people and over our deepening dissent, the US plans to flood Guam, its Colony in Perpetuity, with upwards of 50,000 people, which includes the 8,000 US Marines and their 9,000 dependents being ousted by Okinawa and an outside labor force estimated upwards of 20,000 workers on construction contracts. In addition, six nuclear submarines will be added to the three already stationed in Guam as well as a monstrous Global Strike Force, a strike and intelligence surveillance reconnaissance hub at Andersen Air Force Base.

This buildup only complements the impressive Air Force and Navy show of force occupying one-third of our 212 square mile island already. This massive military expansionism exacts devastating consequences on my people, who make up only 37 percent of the 170,000 people living in Guam and who already suffer the signature maladies of a colonial condition.

The military buildup of Guam endangers our fundamental and inalienable human right to self-determination, the exercise of which our Administering Power, the United States, has strategically denied us—in glaring betrayal of its international obligations under the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, UN General Assembly Resolution 1514, to name but some.

The unilateral decision to hyper-militarize our homeland is the latest in a long line of covenant breaches on the part of our Administering Power to guide Guam toward self-governance. It was made totally without consulting the indigenous Chamoru people. No public education campaign regarding the social, cultural, and political consequences of this hyper-militarization has been seriously undertaken or even contemplated.

Of the \$10.3 billion settled upon by the US and Japan for the transfer of US Marines from Okinawa to Guam, nothing has been said as to whether or not this money will be used to improve our flailing infrastructure. Recently, the largest joint military exercise in recent history conducted what were casually called war games off Guam waters. 22,000 US military personnel, 30 ships, and 280 aircraft partook in “Valiant Shield.” That weekend, water was cut off to a number of local villages on the Navy water line. The local people of those villages went some thirty days without running water. Across the military-constructed fence, the tap flowed freely for the US military population. The suggestion of late is that Guam is expected to foot the bill of this re-occupation.

Meetings with defense officials have proved empty. Military officers we have met with inform us only of their inability to commit to anything. In effect, they repeat that they have no working plans to spend money on civilian projects. Dollars tied to this transfer have been allocated to development only within the bases. Money for education in the territory will again be allocated to schools for children of US military personnel and not ours. Meanwhile, virtually every public sector in Guam is being threatened with privatization.

There is talk of plans to condemn more of our land to accommodate its accelerated military needs. In contrast, there is no talk of plans to clean up radioactive contaminations (strontium, in particular) of Guam from toxins leftover from the US' World War II activities and its intense nuclear bombing campaign of the Marshall Islands only 1200 miles from Guam. Indeed, the indigenous Chamoru people of Guam suffer extraordinarily high rates of cancer and dementia-related illness due to the US' widespread toxic contamination of Guam. For example, Chamorus suffer from nasopharynx cancer at a rate 1,999% higher than the US average (per 100,000). To boot, Guam has 19 Superfund sites, most of which are associated with US military base activities as in the case of Andersen Air Force Base and the former Naval Air Station. Nineteen sites is a significant number in consideration of the island's small size of 212 square meters.

There is also no word on whether or not the US plans to pay war reparations due to us since it forgave Japan its World War II war crimes committed against the Chamorus.

Like an awful re-run of World War II, when the US unilaterally forgave Japan its horrific war crimes on our people, the US is back at the table negotiating away our human rights including our right to self-determination. Beyond the B-2 bombers in our skies, the ships playing war games in our waters, the added weapons of mass destruction, and the contamination that has robbed us of so many loved ones by way of our extraordinarily high rates of cancers and dementia-related illnesses, there is a growing desperation back home. A desperate lethargy in the wind. A realization that if the UN remains unable to slow the manic speed of US militarization, Chamorus as a people will pass.

In 2005 and 2006, we appeared before the UN Special Political and Decolonization Committee, alerting the UN organ of these two frightening facts: 1) it was recently discovered that the US Department of Interior purposefully killed a presidential directive handed down in 1975, which ordered that Guam be given a commonwealth status no less favorable than the one the US was negotiating with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands at that time; and 2) a campaign of the Guam Chamber of Commerce (primarily consisting of US Statesiders) to privatize every one of Guam's public resources (the island's only water provider, only power provider, only local telephone provider, public schools, and it's only port, on an island that imports 85-90% of its food and where private monopolies of public goods would truly make us captive to the forces of the market) is undermining our ancient indigenous civilization with violent speed. Eating us whole.

Not much has changed since we last were here in New York. Our power provider has been privatized, our telecommunications sold. Our only water provider and one port are under relentless attack. The meager, questionable victories we have had to stay

this mass privatization are only the result of indigenous Chamoru grassroots activists who, on their own—with no financial, institutional, or strategic support—holding both their hands up, holding the line as best they can. At great personal cost.

Your Excellencies: Know this—the indigenous Chamoru people of Guam are neither informed nor unified around this military buildup despite dominant media representations. For all intents and purposes, there is no free press in Guam. Local media only makes noise of the re-occupation, not sense of it. The Pacific Daily News—the American subsidiary newspaper that dominates the discourse—has cut off the oxygen supply to indigenous resistance movement. Rather than debating this buildup's enormous sociopolitical, environmental and cultural consequences, it has framed the conversation around how best to ask the US (politely) for de facto consideration of our concerns. Without appearing un-American.

We are not Americans. We are Chamorus. We are heirs to a matrilineal, indigenous civilization born two thousand years before Jesus. And we are being disappeared. Off your radar. All this, and only two years until the end of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. And no midterm review by the Special Committee on Decolonization. No designation of any expert to track Guam's progress, or lack thereof, toward progressing off the UN list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Not one UN visiting mission to Guam.

It is a sad commentary that the Administering Power year after year abstains or votes against UN resolutions addressing the "Question of Guam" and resolutions reflecting the work of the UN on decolonization including the resolution on the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism and the very recent Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. With this non-support by Guam's Administering Power, it is no wonder that the list of the Non-Self-Governing Territories under the administration of the United States has turned half a century old with little progress.

We Chamorus come to New York year after year, appealing to the UN decolonization committee to follow through with its mandate. Indeed, the UN has collected almost thirty years of our testimony, with nothing to show for it. I represent today the third generation of Chamoru activists to appear before the UN, desperately trying to safeguard our inalienable, still unrealized, human right to self-determination.

The failure of the US to honor its international obligations to Guam and her native people, the non-responsiveness of the UN Special Committee on Decolonization to our rapid deterioration, and the overall non-performance of relevant US and UN Decolonization organs and officials combine to carry our small chance of survival to its final coffin.

All this combines to elevate the human rights situation in Guam as a matter not only of decolonization, but ethnic cleansing. Indeed, when future generations look upon these days, they might label Guam not merely a US colony, but rather, a UN colony. To date the Forum has deferred to the Special Committee. The time has come for the Forum to take the lead. To this end we request the Forum take the following action:

1. Sponsor an expert seminar in conjunction with the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Special Committee on Decolonization

to examine the impact of the UN decolonization process regarding the indigenous peoples of the NSGTs—now and previously listed on the UN list of NSGTs. This seminar must be under the auspices of the Forum due to existing problems with the Secretariat of the Special Committee. We request that Independent Expert Carlyle G. Corbin be included in the seminar as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Indigenous Peoples.

2. Utilize the Inter-Agency Support Group to begin to implement the Program of Implementation (POI) with UN Agencies, UNDP, UNEP and other agencies and specialized bodies as directed by the General Assembly; and
3. Communicate its concern for the human rights of indigenous peoples and all peoples in the NSGTs to the UN Human Rights Council and request that the Council designate a Special Rapporteur on the Situation of the Peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories.

*– Sinangan Si Julian Aguon
I Nasion Chamoru
UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*