



Mina'Trenta Na Liheslaturan Guahan

Senator vicente (ben) c. pangelinan (D)

Testimony on H.R. 3940

by

Senator ben c. pangelinan, Chairman
Committee on Appropriations, Taxation,
Banking, Insurance, Insurance Retirement and Land
30th Guam Legislature

Chairman
Committee on
Appropriations, Taxation,
Banking, Insurance, and
Land

Member
Committee on Education

Member
Committee on
Municipal Affairs,
Aviation, Housing, and
Recreation

Member
Committee on Labor, the
Public Structure,
Public Libraries, and
Technology

Buenas yan Håfa Adai, Madame Chairwoman and Members of the Committee,

The consideration of H.R. 3940 by your Committee is welcomed and appreciated by the people of Guam, because your interest provides hope and opportunity for a broader understanding and support for Guam's quest for self-determination by our leaders in the Nation's Capitol. On behalf of our people, I would like to thank the Committee Chairwoman and author of this Bill, the Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo, for the opportunity to submit testimony on H.R. 3940. I extend the sentiment to those who stand with her and us in support of this legislation. Si Yu'os Ma'åse' todus hamyo.

In 1987, the people of Guam moved forward in the quest for self-determination through the passage of the "Guam Commonwealth Act"; however, attempts to introduce and formalize an agreement with the United States Congress met an impenetrable wall. We pray that the passage of time and the education which will come with the passage of this bill will be our Gideon's trumpet for the dismantling of this wall.

I must distinguish for the Committee though the difference between more internal self governance granted by the Commonwealth Act and the exercise of self-determination. While they may be of the same family, one is not the twin of the other and it is self-determination that the people of Guam seek. Despite the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and UN Resolution 63/108, our people have yet to exercise freely our inherent right to vote on desired “political status and freely” pursue our economic, social and cultural development, which the United States as the administrating authority over Guam has committed to in acceding to the placement of Guam on the list of non-self governing territories when it became a signatory of the United Nations Charter.

Foreign governance and it’s dominance over the people and institutions of Guam has nearly erased our Chamorro ancestry and heritage. The suppression of a society’s inherent right self-determination in terms of governing itself has made it a distant reality since the arrival of European voyagers and missionaries. Between 1668 (when Spanish missionaries first arrived on Guam, claiming it for the crown of Spain) and 1950 (when the Organic Act of Guam was unilaterally put in place over the people of Guam by the U.S. Congress) Guam’s people have been subjects of governing powers from abroad. Three hundred years of governance by occupation has corralled our rights, which have left us confined and fenced, unable to pursue any form of true political self-determination. The people of Guam have been force-fed with the idea that the only form of civil rule for our island is from external origins—namely metropolitan nations with overwhelmingly dominant military and economic forces.

Political status issues affecting Guam will continue to be influenced by the global economic wellbeing and international political posturing that exists today. The current trend of U.S. National Defense interests and priorities for this region has exacerbated an already complex

relationship between Guam and the various branches of the United States Armed Services strategically situated locally present-day.

The path of our quest for self-determination has taken a fork in the road to accommodate the needs of the United States, our administrating authority, which continues to make decisions on our behalf despite our indigenous and inherent right to make these determinations for ourselves.

The Guam Commission on Decolonization, established in 1997, was created to sheppard the exercise of self-determination by the native inhabitants of Guam via a plebiscite vote. It was mandated to create three task forces to advocate for Independence, *Free Association*, and *Statehood* for Guam. Each task force is prescribed with the duty to provide educated analyses, position papers, and statistical evidence to enhance public education and bring about an informed decision by our people upon receiving the right to vote on our political status. Even as recent as the 30th Guam Legislature, it has been reported that the task forces have not been successful in delivering their missions greatly hampered by the lack of funding hindering their progress.

For many years, I have made it my personal mission to advocate and promote our right to self-determination. In fact, as of two years ago my office staff and I initiated hosting the Guam Decolonization Registry to assist and advance the process of fulfilling the mandate for a plebiscite to be held for our people to decide our political status. It has come to our attention that one of the reasons people are hesitant to register is due to a lack of education and resources on the issue presented. As the trend of nonparticipation continues to increase, our population of indigenous Chamorros continues to decrease, thus presenting a more challenging environment for us to accomplish the mandated numbers for the plebiscite.

Guam is beginning to feel the impact of the proposed relocation of 8,000 Marines from the U.S. Marine Corps bases in Okinawa. The unilateral decision of the United States' industrial military complex to expand their footprint on Guam is a grim reminder of the Organic Act, its imbalance and complete disregard of our right to self-determination.

There is a sense of social and economic apprehension that surrounds this massive effort to relocate troops. Perhaps because it is not quite clear to the people of Guam what the extent of this U.S. Department of Defense strategy will mean to the island. The economic gains expected to benefit Guam residents throughout the duration of the military build-up will be short-lived when compared to the costs to the island and our people - who continue to be denied the most fundamental right to self-determination.

In the end, will the Chamorro way of life as we know it today, continue to flourish, or will the demand for change command too great a price from the Chamorro people, the island environment we inhabit, the indigenous culture we hold dear and perhaps most important of all, the identity that binds us all together as *I Manaotao Tåno'* (the people of the land).

Madam Chairwoman and Committee Members, I am compelled to submit testimony in support of H.R 3940 for several reasons. First, I perceive that this legislation will provide an opportunity to educate all Guam's people about the political status options available to us. Secondly, I believe that this is a necessary phase in the quest for self-determination, a phase that is essential to every Chamorro and especially young Chamorros who will exercise our right to self-determination. Thirdly, I anticipate that provisions of this legislation will ultimately provide resources that will help educate people from all walks of life and from every part of the world about the plight of the Chamorros as we pursue our inalienable right to self-determination. Lastly, it is always wise to gather one's thoughts, ideas, and sentiments about important issues

affecting us. The public education process associated with H.R. 3940 would help every individual examine his choice and decision in the matter, as well as to fully understand what the ramifications of their action would mean.

Today, there are concerns that the public education campaign for political self-determination will fall on the heels of the massive repositioning of U.S. Armed Services troops in the Asia-Pacific theatre. The expected impact of this event warrants greater attention and urgency in addressing the question of Guam's political status and magnifies the need to successfully complete this initiative prior to the proposed relocation of 8,000 Marines and 9,000 dependents from Okinawa to Guam.

There seems to be much uncertainty about how well Guam will adapt to the military build-up pressures. This is where reality sets, that without first addressing the issue of political status for Guam, the people of Guam will once again become an occupied colony, despite the benevolence of its occupier, affecting the quality of life on this island and impacting generations to come.

If I may, I would like to offer the following recommendation on how H.R. 3940 could be amended to better address the needs and desires of Guam:

Pursuant to Section 2 of the Act, the eligibility to receive U.S. Department of Interior and other federal grants to fund the public education program for Guam's political status is certainly commendable. Many may argue the question why should the United States fund Guam's quest for self-determination? The reason is simple. The United States must acknowledge and take ownership of its interest in and its relationship with Guam and the matter remains unresolved. It is imperative that the United States Congress and President of the United States honor Guam's

people and our right to define our future. It promised to do this when it joined the world community via membership in the United Nations and acceptance of its charter.

Thus, I urge that the preferred approach for funding the closure to over 300 years of external imposition of the political status for Guam is through a direct appropriation measure. The programs associated with educating and formalizing the indigenous right to self-determination is estimated to cost no less than \$2 million (using estimates of previous expenditure for a similar program with adjustment for inflation and scope).

The above recommendation is aimed at emphasizing the need, importance, and timeliness of facilitating the public education program for the people of Guam while minimizing the administrative obstacles that could pose lengthy delay in the process.

Manana si Yu'os Todos Hamyo.