

Håfa adai (greetings) distinguished members of the United Nations Special Political and Decolonization Committee (4th Committee), and Chairman, His Excellency Mr. Rafael Carreño.

Guåhu si Kerri Ann Naputi Borja familial Kaderon yan familial Daso. Saina ma'ase for allowing me to be here and speak to you all today. I, along with my sisters and brothers are here today to testify on the Question of Guam. Our island is the longest colonized nation within Oceania, with the United States being our current administrating power. US imperialism, colonization, and militarization has had many adverse effects not only to our island, but also to our language, culture, and ultimately our identity as Chamorus, the indigenous peoples of Guam.

I address you this afternoon on behalf of Sagan Kotturan Chamoru, a grassroots organization and cultural center, whose purpose is to protect, promote, and perpetuate the Chamoru language and culture. Our organization and cultural center were created because our people needed a place where we could remember, know, and cultivate our roots through the learning of our true history, the speaking of our Chamoru language, and the practice of our traditions for future generations.

Our identity as Chamorus continues to be threatened by the colonization and militarization of our island by our administering power, both physically and mentally. In order to colonize a land, one must colonize the minds of the people. The miseducation of our people has worked to marginalize our language, beliefs, history and practices in our spaces of learning to near invisibility. Today, we are working daily to reclaim these spaces and create new ones where our culture and people can thrive.

When the US first gained control of our island in 1898, the Naval government would begin the process of colonizing the minds of our people through US public schools. Our people were forced to learn English and forbidden to speak Chamoru. To speak their native tongue in school would result in fines to their family for every Chamoru word spoken or even, physical harm. When US control resumed in 1944, their language ban continued and was more strictly enforced. Not only were students kept from speaking Chamoru, they were denied the right to learn about themselves. Instead children were taught about US American culture and history in English from a white Western dominant narrative.

The English language would continue to be the official language of our island until the 1970s, when Chamoru leaders legally adopted the Chamoru language as an official language. Eventually, recognizing that generations of Chamorus had been raised without learning their language, lawmakers mandated that Chamoru language and culture be taught in public schools. However, after decades of forcing people to speak English, most Chamorus had stopped using

the language with their children and there has not been enough emersion in the schools or homes to create fluency. Thus, English remains the dominant language spoken on Guam today.

Being an indigenous Chamoru woman and educator, I know the importance of knowing one's language and culture. Although I grew up off-island most of life, only visiting my home island on holidays, it was through learning my language and culture that I was able to find my identity and deep connection to my ancestors, peoples, family, culture, and island. It is this connection that led me to move home so that I could continue to learn who I am as a Chamoru and to teach young Chamorus. Through teaching in Guam public schools, I saw first hand how we are still feeling the effects of the past, as a majority of my Chamoru students and parents were unable to speak and understand Chamoru.

US Census data from 1990, 2000, and 2010 show that the number of Chamoru speakers has dwindled to 17 percent, and a vast majority of those who speak our language fluently are over the age of 55 and are dying. Although our language may be in danger of dying completely, it is not dead yet. There is a proverb from our Tongan sisters and brothers which says, "Where there is no language, there is no culture...Where there is no culture, darkness befalls and village is no more." I use this simply to show how language and culture are directly linked to the existence of a people and the land in which they live, they are all intertwined and one cannot survive without the other.

There is a new generation of Chamorus, some of us who are here today, who understand this and know the importance of our language, culture, people, and land, who speak to their children in Chamoru. We are fighting to sustain and preserve all that we have and all that makes us who we are. We will continue to fight for what is destined for us, our right to self-determination. However we can not do this alone. We need the help of the 4th Committee.

We offer our support of the draft resolution on the Question of Guam with emphasis on the urgent need for the administering power "to recognize and to respect the political and the cultural and ethnic identity of the Chamoru people of Guam." Part of this identity involves access to our sacred spaces, and we ask that you include language in the resolution condemning the administering Power's plans to build a firing range above Litekyan.

We support our governor's request for a UN Visiting Mission to Guam and invite you to our beautiful island to learn more about our language and culture and help in efforts to keep them alive and thriving.

Saina Ma'åse. (Thank you)