



Mina' Trenta Na Liheslaturan Guahan

Senator vicente (ben) c. pangelinan (D)

Senator Vicente (ben) Cabrera Pangelinan
Hearing on Assessing the Guam War Claims Commission Process
House Armed Services Committee
United States Congress
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Washington D.C.

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

***Manana si Yu'os* Honorable Chairman Ike Skelton and esteemed Members of the Armed Services Committee.**

In the novel A Christmas Carol, the ghost of Christmas past appears to Ebenezer Scrooge and shows him what kind of person he is and how he has treated people in his life. My familiarization with this western classic just about ends there; forgive this *Chamorro* if he gets his metaphors mixed.

I hope that unlike Ebenezer Scrooge, we are not facing the ghost of war reparation hearings past, which will only see what happened in the past, hear what happened in the past, and understand what happened in the past, and then it ends. I pray that we will finally see action, because we have had our fill of "we hear you, we understand your pain, and we sympathize with how you were treated", and I am not referring to the Japanese's brutal treatment of the *Chamorros* during its occupation of *Guahan*.

Despite the many beatings, forced marches and torture inflicted by a brutal enemy who suspected assistance to the Americans, the *Chamorros* of *Guahan*, that is, every man, woman and child never gave up the American soldiers who were left behind during the war, to the Japanese enemy. They endured, at the peril of death and at the risk of their families' lives, and were

subjected to beatings and dangerous situations. And no one ever begged for mercy or turned to the enemy to escape its cruelty.

As a Senator of *I Mina' Trenta Na Liheslaturan Guåhan*, I testify before you on behalf of those voices silenced by fear, incapacitation, or death. Today, we come before you, our liberators from a war not of our making and not waged to suit any of our needs, thankful and grateful. We are here to seek justice, and not merely in pursuit of recognition as the title of HR 44 implies. Despite all the rejections of the past sixty years, we, as we did in war, we will do in peace, we will not beg. We stand tall and tell you we have earned the justice we seek. We still have faith that America is the one place on earth where justice will prevail.

We look to this Committee and this Congress to prove our faith is not in vain. The people of *Guahan* deserve more than perfunctory recognition. The *Chamorros* of *Guahan* deserve "action" – action that our people will never forget. Time cannot heal all wounds and the federal government knows this all too well in the Pacific area. A history of inaction continues the festering of the wounds caused by unmet obligations. And we are not afraid to tell you, Basta, Basta, Basta. No More, No More, No More.

We are no longer a generation rooted in the gratefulness of a liberation. We are a generation whose hearts have been hardened by unkept promises and transgressions unresolved. Knowing this, you have no reason to be surprised if you are met with arms raised in opposition rather than arms open to accept your plans to take our lands again, change our way of life forever, to once again suit your needs. Self-determination continues to be withheld and not supported by any

action until just a few weeks ago with the hearing on HR 3940 to provide grants via the Department of Interior for a political status public educational program to facilitate the plebiscite on self determination for the native inhabitants of *Guahan*. The United States voluntarily assumed this obligation when it placed *Guahan* on the list of non-self governing territories and agreed to be the administrating authority under the United Nations Charter.

When we finally see action in the return of lands taken after the war which the federal government deemed they no longer needed, albeit more than 45 years later, we see even quicker action to reverse the course. Today, we again face the taking of our lands to support the re-location of over 8,000 or 10,000 marines and the unprecedented population growth of over 45,000 or 80,000 people depending who you talk to, to accomplish this military build-up. They are being re-located to relieve the burden of hosting the Marines by the people of Okinawa. If there is a burden to hosting the Marines being borne by the people of Okinawa, there will be a burden associated with hosting the Marines by the *Chamorro* people. We are asked to bear this new burden, without first being relieved of the old burden of a wartime occupation, and in the wake of continued denial of war reparations. There is a Chamorro saying "*Dalai esta este na ma la bida*" which translates to *This treatment is just too much*.

I am here today, traveling over 7,938 miles, crossing almost half the world's time zones, coming from tomorrow, to be here today on behalf of the people of *Guahan*. I am here to plead for not just mere recognition of their sacrifices, but seeking justice for how they were treated not just by enemy

occupiers during the war, but the liberators after the war. I am here today, along with other representatives of the people of *Guahan* to show our commitment and voice our desire to bring closure on the war reparations issue.

While today we address the war reparations, it is not the only issue that remains unresolved between the people of *Guahan* and the United States. The United States plans to expand military activities on *Guahan* placing our lands and resources at certain risk of environmental and ecological harm from these new activities. Yet, our land remains contaminated and waits for remediation and clean-up from its earlier occupation. The damage to our people's health, from the dreaded disease of cancer, which befalls our people at a greater rate than almost any other community in our country from proven exposure to radiation fallout, continues as we are made to wait for our inclusion in programs to heal these wounds, available only to our continental cousins.

The people of *Guahan* are here with me in spirit to show our commitment and voice our desire to bring closure to the war reparations. In the eyes of *Chamorros*, America did not forgive the Japanese for any and all war crimes or atrocities committed upon the people of *Guahan*. In our eyes America "pardoned" Japan for all the death, rape, beheadings, forced marches, starvation, and separation of families it imposed upon our *Chamorro* people. This in our eyes is just as clear as when President Gerald Ford pardoned former President Richard Nixon. Let there be no mistake, that single act added much to the years of suffering by *Chamorros* on *Guahan*. Because of that act, there are many Americans and new-comers to *Guahan* who actually believe that the land-takings

were really not a big issue and that the *Chamorros* here did not suffer any more than most Americans in similar conflicts. This could not be further from the truth, but it is hard to blame these mistaken individuals when the United States government treats our people and this part of our history as if it was no big deal.

Over the three (3) years of occupation, Guam was renamed *Omiyatu* by the Imperial Japanese. Our island paradise became home to torture and oppression. Our *Manâmkô* and adults of the war period are for the most part gone now. Their children who witnessed torture, forced labor, injury, forced march, internment, and death, survived to give their accounts and hold their stories in their hearts. They too carry the scars and nightmares of this experience.

I ask that you listen to a generation savoring freedom after three years of brutal occupation, the gratefulness for liberation and the generosity they showered on America. Hear it, understand it, sympathize with it, but do not for a moment think of taking advantage of it again and do not accept it by continued inaction.

I recognize your responsibility and heavy obligation to act on evidence that there were disparities in the treatment of the people of *Guahan* in war claim compensation compared to other compensation programs. Do not focus on the claims that were filed and the payments made. Listen to the stories today. See and hear of the claims not filed and paperwork not submitted, as *Chamorros* told each other of the value placed upon their lives, homes, and the suffering endured and of dollars claimed and pennies paid and the decision that it was not worth it.

The issue of whether the people of *Guahan* were treated fairly by those which held authority over the process of claiming and paying for the taking of

their lands, the damages inflicted upon their lives and the destruction of their belongings have been studied literally to death. Many of those harmed have succumbed to their injuries after the war and some were just not able to outrun Father Time, before justice could come to them.

First there was the Hopkins Commission of 1947 and now the War Claims Commission of 2004. Both reports issued by each commission concluded that something more needs to be done to make things right for the people of *Guahan* to give them justice and peace in the remaining years of their lives. The findings of each commission state that in the process of resolving their claims, the people of *Guahan* were misinformed and mistreated. For the people of *Guahan*, there was no parity, thus no justice to bring them peace with America.

Each time the issue has come before this august body, the recommendations remains the same. The people of *Guahan* deserve recognition for the loyalty they displayed to the United States in the face of a brutal enemy and the atrocities inflicted upon them. Now we have the findings of a federal commission, which found that there was no parity in the treatment of the people of *Guahan* and others in the compensation programs of those similarly situated.

Throughout our island, we still see evidence of *Guahan's* historical struggle. Concrete bunkers remain on our seashores, heavy artillery become landmarks overgrown with jungle, and war zones claiming lives converted to historical parks. *Chamorros*, throughout our island can attest to the plight of their ancestors forced to march to the concentration camp in *Manenggon* Valley and to massacres in the caves of *Tinta* and *Faha*. These accounts come from our people

whose hands washed clothes in rivers, worked in rice fields, and constructed airfield - all at point of the bayonet and threat of death.

Our people share childhood memories as our *manāmkos* search for closure that comes with formal recognition. As individuals, each of us testifying today recognizes this may be our last chance to accurately recount American history. These are the unsung heroes of our wartime effort. You will discover six decades of patience and the emotional buildup of those hesitant to discuss brutality reaching far past the gates of Auschwitz. No other American family suffered bombings, occupation by the Axis of evil, prayed for liberation, and had one year in the midst of rebuilding after war to make war claims known to the federal government.

The *Chamorros* of *Guahan* do not expect payment to turn back time, change history, or alter the future. But recognition of a people's sacrifice in upholding their honor, maintaining their dignity in the fight for their liberty, and demonstrating steadfast loyalty remain priceless. That is evidence of everything our founding fathers envisioned, everything thousands of young American soldiers died for on the shoreline of Guam's beaches, and that will memorialize our history, bring peace to a dying generation, and alter the future for new generations. We too fought for our freedom, upheld our dignity, and earned this compensation. We know we deserve it. And yes, we want all Americans to understand it.

Congress formed this commission and after countless years and eventful political advancements; we thank Guam Delegates Antonio Won Pat, Ben Blaz,

Robert Underwood, and Madeleine Bordallo for their efforts. However, with faith in democracy and the will of our leaders and our people, we slowly close one era while educating the next. I believe as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. remarked, "We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream".

The book of history is never complete. The writing continues, the judgment will come, and while it may never be "too late" to make some difference, I ask that you correct this injustice today. Not a single generation should again pass without sharing in the justice deserved.

Let there be no more naysayers. The Congress endorses it. The Administration supports it. Our Nation's place in history as a just and caring government demands it.

Today, I am grateful you have invited all of us to the table. Let no more time pass.

Thank you *yan si Yu'os ma'âse'*.