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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Pacific regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International
Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: commitments and actions for
decolonization in the Non-Self-Governing Territories**

**Managua, Nicaragua
31 May to 2 June 2016**

STATEMENT BY

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(GUAM)

Hafa Adai, Chairman Carreño, from our island of Guam! I want to congratulate you on your chairmanship for the C24 Committee and wish you all the luck and success!

On March 31st as part of his Annual State of the Island Address, I outlined a bold plan to hold a decolonization plebiscite by November of this year. I argued that after years of inaction at both the local and national level, the time was right for us to push ahead boldly and seize our destiny:

It's time we confronted the fact that, for nearly 400 years, the state of the island has also been colonial. It is the unchanged and unrepentant shadow cast upon our unshackled destiny. Behind us are the ruins of our colonial past. In front of us, the promise of our future, determined by us.

So what are we waiting for? Self-determination is a powerful path for a people to take. It waits for no one, and requires the collective control of the conscience and choice of the community...Some people want to build a wall to keep non-Americans out of the country. I've oftentimes wondered whether that wall already exists, and we're the ones stranded outside

the fort. What more if another wall goes up? Will we be considered Americans when we knock at the gate?

Chairman Carreño, According to local law, a decolonization plebiscite can be held only after 70% of native inhabitants (those who meet the legal definition as Chamorro) are registered to vote in one. At present less than 10,000 native inhabitants have signed up to be registered and due to vagueness in the law, it is difficult to determine what exactly is target number of native inhabitants that must be registered in order for a plebiscite to be held. This has been a frustration for my Administration since we began our first term in 2011. As part of my new proposal, I sought to circumvent the 70% requirement by law and instead used a different legal mechanism in order to determine the will of Guam's colonized people.

In my speech I called for a referendum to be held, using the proposition/referendum process which private individuals can use in order to help promote important issues at the community and government level. The intent was to break through the bureaucracy and stagnation and push forward with a vote, however this proposal received a great deal of criticism from community activists. This route would

have potentially violated a number of Government of Guam laws, most important of which is that a referendum, unlike a plebiscite would be open to all voters in Guam, regardless of their race or status as a colonized person.

In April, I met with the Commission on Decolonization to present my plans for an expedited educational plan and the holding of a plebiscite in November of this year. After some very healthy debate, the Commission on Decolonization agreed to endorse my educational plan and with academics from the University of Guam, work to create and approve the educational materials. My office is now closely working with the Commission on Decolonization.

In our most recent meeting earlier this month, the Commission on Decolonization approved a series of narratives about Guam's colonial history, the international dimensions to our process of decolonization and short descriptions of each of the three political statuses. The intent is to use these materials in brochures and social media outreach posts to help jumpstart the educational process. The collaboration in the creation of these materials, then the editing and approving of them is a very hopeful

sign that our people can move ahead unified on this issue.

Chairman Carreño, neither my office nor the Commission on Decolonization are interested in pushing for a vote if the native inhabitant population is not yet ready. To this end, we have agreed to conduct two surveys of public opinion, one during this month and the second during July, to ascertain if our initial efforts at igniting the discussion have produced measurable results. When the Commission on Decolonization meets in July, we will analyze the survey data and if there has not been a significant increase in awareness we will no longer plan to hold the decolonization plebiscite this year. If there has been a significant increase, we will push ahead with an expedited educational campaign with plans to hold the plebiscite as part of the elections in November.

Part of the impetus for this campaign is due to current availability of funds for education. Under my Administration, local monies to be used for political status education have been provided for the first time in almost two decades. At present the Commission on Decolonization has a budget of \$250,000 with the majority of those funds earmarked for use by the

three political status task forces for Guam (Statehood, Free Association and Independence). One of the political status task forces has already begun to spend their appropriation and is currently holding events in the community with the intent of educating the public on the opportunities Independence would offer Guam if chosen by the native inhabitants.

In addition to this, my administration wrote and was ecstatic to hear that our \$300,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Interior would be made available to us in July of 2016. These funds are to be used for the creation of materials for an decolonization educational campaign. After several years of requesting these funds and confusing messages from USDO I about how to apply for it, we are excited to see our administering power finally providing some support in this regard. We are hopeful that this might indicate a shift in U.S. policy to its non-self-governing territories such as Guam, where they will be more willing to engage in discussions about our future and offer true support to help push us towards true self-governances and self-determination. By the way, I believe this is the first time in our history to receive monetary support, so I am very thankful to the United States!

Chairman Carreño, last month, 800 high school students and community members gathered as the audience for a historic event, the first ever high school debate over decolonization. The debate consisted of three teams, each representing a different political status option for Guam; Statehood, Free Association and Independence. The teams had four members, one from each of the participating high schools. Those students worked for weeks with representatives from the three political status task forces on Guam, in order to conduct research and shape the best possible arguments in favor of their team's designated political future. Overall, this event was organized through cooperation with the Guam Department of Education and the Commission on Decolonization. I fully supported this event.

The debate between the teams was very fiery and even featured some exciting examples of our youth using our Chamorro language in their arguments. A team of judges provided scores for each team and debater, but the overall winner for the event would instead be determined by most positive change achieved in the audience. A poll was given to those attending prior to the debate and immediately afterwards. The winning team would not necessarily be the one who achieved the most votes in general,

but instead be the one who could show that they had the most significant effect on convincing people to choose their status between the pre and post polls. The pre-debate poll showed the audience clearly favoring Statehood, who out of approximately 800 people, received 51% of their votes. Free Association followed with 30% and Independence with 19%.

After the debate was over, the judges announced their scores and determined Statehood to be their winner on points. As they did, volunteers spread throughout the gym gathering up the post-debate ballots. Within minutes these were counted and the results written large for all to see. In the end the Independence team won, by shifting the most people in the crowd towards their status through the power of their arguments. In the final total Statehood dipped 3 points to arrive at 48%, and Free Association fell by 12 points to 18%. Independence on the other hand shot up 15 points for a final tally of 34% of the audience vote. This was an exciting moment, as it represented the first time in our history that the youth have taken up this issue loudly, proudly and publicly. The debate was filmed and is currently being showed on television on the island. I look forward to future events such as this.

Chairman Carreño, at present, the island of Guam is celebrating our hosting of the 12th Festival of Pacific Arts, an exciting event held every four years in a different Pacific Island. During this Festival, known as FESTPAC more than two dozen island nations gather together to share their cultures with each other and celebrate Pacific Islander pride. There are over 13,000 people who have come to our island and we are proud to be hosting this important celebration known as the Cultural Olympics of the Pacific. As part of the festivities a Decolonization Discussion Series has been organized, where various islands are coming to discuss their process of decolonization and how their particular political status, whether it be statehood, free association or independence, has benefited them.

Thank you and have a great day!