

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, Dignitaries, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Håfa Adai. My name is Amanda Francel Blas, and I am the newly appointed executive director for Guam's Commission on Decolonization. On behalf of the Honorable Eddie Baza Calvo, Governor of Guam, I will provide you with an update on our experience as a territory of the United States of America and on our island's decolonization efforts.

As a territory, Guam is subjected to many of the federal mandates that are imposed on the 50 states. These mandates are meant to help states and territories meet the goals of the U.S. government. Unfortunately, in the case of our island, many of those mandates are unfunded and beyond our control – requiring us to foot the bill and putting us in debt.

One unfunded mandate that heavily plagues Guam is the Earned Income Tax Credits, a tax credit for the working poor. Our island paid out almost \$65 million in EITC last year, which makes up almost half of the tax refunds that are paid out each year. While the states are reimbursed for paying out EITC, we are forced to pay this out of pocket. In the last ten years, we have had to pay out \$450 million in EITC, which has led us to barely being able to manage to keep up with this federal mandate.

Healthcare is another area as a territory where we face challenges in the form of federal mandates. The Affordable Care Act that was passed during the Obama administration expanded Medicaid, providing payment for medical services for low-income citizens. While the Affordable Care Act was generous with the states, which are covered 100% for the costs of Medicaid expansion, it ignored the

territories. We have to pay for 45% of Medicaid costs, which further impacts our debt. If Guam and the other territories received equal treatment with the states, we could avoid the adverse financial situations that other U.S. insular areas are facing.

Another unfunded mandate is the Compact of Free Association, which allows citizens of the Freely Associated States to enter the U.S. without visas. While FAS migrants can move to any of the states or territories, Guam has become their top destination. While the Compact recognizes there should be compensation for states and territories, the reimbursements Guam received has been inadequate of the costs it takes to host FAS citizens. In fiscal year 2016, Guam spent \$142 million to provide educational and social services to FAS citizens, with annual costs exceeding the annual reimbursement, which has been about \$16.8 million in the last several years.

Despite these challenges, we have seen consistent growth each year. Our GDP is measured at \$5.7 billion, a 31-percent increase since 2007. It has been Governor Calvo's focus to improve the quality of life for our people.

The challenges we face as a territory are not only financial. In Resolution 70/102 that was adopted on December 9, 2015, the General Assembly requested our administering power, the U.S., work with our local government to transfer land to the original landowners. We had created a vehicle to make this possible through the Chamorro Land Trust program, which gives native Chamorros the opportunity to lease land for \$1 for 99 years from the Chamorro Land Trust Program. However, the U.S. Department of Justice has threatened a lawsuit over the Chamorro Land Trust, stating it violates the Fair Housing Act which protects citizens from discrimination when it comes to housing. The Department of Justice

has made it clear the only way we can avoid the lawsuit is through a consent decree. Consent decrees imposed on our local government have cost our island hundreds of millions of dollars.

Since Governor Calvo relaunched the Commission on Decolonization in 2011, the island has taken significant strides in its efforts towards achieving self-determination. As the Chairman of the Commission on Decolonization, the Governor ensured local funding was available for the commission to begin the education process, providing local funding to the commission for the first time in 20 years. At the Governor's direction, his team also requested assistance from the Department of Interior and was granted \$300,000 for the same purpose. Our Commission previously has organized village meetings, school presentations and debates, and produced printed materials to help the native inhabitants better understand decolonization, the plebiscite, and the political status options that will be voted on. As for the decolonization registry, more than 11,000 native inhabitants have been registered to vote in the plebiscite, a significant increase since 2000, the last time Guam came close to the possibility of a plebiscite.

As we talk about the future for decolonization in the non-self governing territories, at this point, Guam is up for a huge battle. In March, a U.S. federal court ruled that a self-determination plebiscite on Guam couldn't be limited to native inhabitants. The ruling stated such a plebiscite was unconstitutional because it violated the 15th Amendment, which gives all U.S. citizens the right to vote regardless of their race, color or gender. While our local government is appealing the decision, it remains a major obstacle on our road to self-determination. For more than two centuries, the United States has lived by its Constitution, a cornerstone of freedom guaranteeing

certain rights for its citizens. Yet the U.S. has used this same Constitution to oppress Guam.

We are three years away from 2020, the United Nations' targeted year to eradicate colonialism. However, Guam's ability to reach self-governance may still be beyond reach. The plebiscite has been brought to a halt, with the court decision also preventing us from continuing to populate the decolonization registry required by local law.

While the court of our administering power has greatly hindered us, we have not accepted defeat. Our Commission continues to move forward with its education campaign, which we plan to expand to include the use of social media and other online resources. Use of the island's public broadcasting service for the production of an informative television series is in the works, and a monthly newsletter is well on its way. The three task forces, who serve as advocates for the island's possible political statuses, continue to contribute to our education efforts by participating in forums, hosting monthly informative meetings, and more.

In our quest to self-determination, we have followed the rules. Our efforts have been consistent with the UN Charter, our local laws, and the laws created for us by U.S. Congress; yet the voice of our people continues to get taken away, preventing us from deciding for ourselves the political future of our island. In light of this, we are reaching out for support from not only the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization, but from the UN member states as well. We ask that you urge the U.S. to assume its responsibility in allowing the Guam to fully exercise its inalienable right to self-determination. We also request that you help us develop

ideas on how to overcome our current challenges that hinder our ability to reach self-governance.

Thank you, and *Si Yu'us Ma'ase* for the opportunity to share, dialogue and work with you all.