

# Plebiscite consciousness will lead to public debate, decision

The upcoming plebiscite on decolonization represents the latest in a long series of initiatives by the people of Guam to change and improve their political condition.

As has always been the case, calls for substantial change in our governance have been generated by and energized by the people of Guam and not by any group or political institution in Washington, D.C. If we had waited on Washington for citizenship, an elected governor, or lifting the security clearance, who knows how long we would have waited!

Whether one is informed enough and ready to vote (or whether the plebiscite should be postponed) should prompt us to examine what is really called for in a legitimate decolonization process.

Referencing developed international standards, the expected outcome of a decolonization process is the selection and attainment of a self-governing (sovereign) political status, based on the democratically expressed will of the people under colonial rule. The people's freely expressed will is evidence of their self-determination. These self-governing statuses are embodied in independence, free association or full integration with a sovereign nation (in our case, statehood).

As we look at ourselves in the world environment, one can only be encouraged by the Holy See's recognition, in Bethlehem, of the right of the Palestinian people to a "homeland." Moreover, Pope John Paul II explicitly recognized this as a "natural right." He noted that The Vatican has consistently supported "the rights of all the peoples involved, on the basis

of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions and declarations."

The Guam Commission on Decolonization for the Implementation of the Exercise of Chamorro Self-Determination (Guam P.L. 23-147 as amended) has laid out a comprehensive public awareness and education plan. Today we have completed a consciousness-raising stage. It was the intent of this stage (Phase 1) to generate awareness about the decolonization process and the Chamorro right to self-determination. Some elements of awareness will continue, but the fact that people are calling for more information is testimony to some measure of success in raising awareness about the process.

Beginning in early April, more detailed information will become available. This information will come from the research papers of the three status task forces, as well as from a study on the economic impact of all three political status options. The information will be widely disseminated and available to anyone who desires it. Additionally, the task forces will continue to be a source of information and discussion about the status options.

With more information comes increased discussion and debate. At this point, people's decisions about the best status for Guam's future will become firmer. The commission will have a role in facilitating debate, but the

real discussions about the people's preferred status will occur over the barbecue, at the dinner table and other occasions when fam-

ily, friends and acquaintances come together. This process then will have moved from awareness-raising, to information, to public debate and, finally, a decision through the ballot.

As with any major change in life, tensions and trepidations will arise. This is not

unexpected even in cases where the change is highly desired. In a legitimate decolonization process, we are challenged to not only change our political condition but to also alter the effects of past political conditioning. Colonialism is political conditioning, which has reinforced limitations rather than liberation and our real potential.

The commission is a responsible steward of this process. It is our duty to ensure that it is done well and that the results accurately reflect the expressed wishes of the Chamorro people. As with any process, we will make necessary adjustments or changes as conditions call for them.

Fanachu Para l Derecho ta yan Para l Destinu ta.

*Ron Rivera is vice chairman of the Guam Commission on Decolonization.*

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Commission on Decolonization