

# Right to self-determination fulfills promise made to Chamorro people

Another beautiful day had dawned and I was having my morning coffee when I read another article by a political science professor at the University of Guam regarding self-determination.

Where does the University find these people? And to think they are teaching our kids!



**Chris Perez Howard**

A. Gaffar Peang-Meth, Ph.D., wrote the article. From his ramblings, I gather he was against Chamorro self-determination and brought in everything but the kitchen sink to try and prove his point. He starts

off the article by saying "Political self-determination means to determine one's political future by oneself without any imposed higher political authority." He apparently got hung up on the self.

Rather than agonizing over the words all he had to do was look in the dictionary. My little Random House Webster's Dictionary even has it — "Self-determination: freedom of a people to determine the way in which they shall be governed."

Then, if he had looked up "people" he would have found it to mean "the body

of persons who constitute a group by virtue of a common culture, religion or the like." And these are simple definitions! The word "people" does not always mean a group of individuals, and in regards to self-determination, it certainly does not.

Next, he takes us on a brainstorming ride to Taiwan, East Timor and Chechnya and appears to not be able to tell the political differences between them — certainly not between a local election and self-determination plebiscite.

Then, surprisingly, he makes sense when writing about the United Nations Charter and Guam as a non-self-governing territory. But how does he end that nice passage? He writes, "On Guam, the act of self-determination has been used as a synonym for independence."

P-I-e-a-s-e! I've been advocating Chamorro rights for 19 years when the Organization of People for Indigenous Rights was founded. In all that time, we have always stressed that our advocacy was for self-determination and not for any political status option.

From then on, he starts sliding downhill. In trying to wrap up his argument, he goes back to his wrong beginning by going back to the individual, using selected phrases from the U.N. Charter. He used one from the Preamble and No. 3 under article 1, Chapter I, Purposes and Principles. What he conveniently skipped, was No. 2. "To develop friendly relations among nations based on re-

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As OPIR has expressed in the past through U.S. policy, thousands of Chamorros have migrated to Guam. These new residents, while fine and understanding, were never promised the right to self-determination for Guam.

It was the Chamorro people (mainland inhabitants) who had the dependent relationship with the U.S. and for whom the U.S. was responsible to bring to self-government as a process of self-determination. And it was the Chamorro people for whom Congress wrote the Organic Act. The Chamorros have not yet determined their future as a result of a long colonial history. To now allow thousands of individuals who are, themselves, part of the colonial legacy to past to participate in the Chamorro right to self-determination violates the concept of "inalienable right."

Such a right cannot be sold, transferred or given away. This is not a case of discrimination, as some claim, but the fulfillment of a promise. And to allow one to participate is, in effect, to discriminate against the rights of Chamorros.

*Chris Perez Howard is a member of the Organization of People for Indigenous Rights*



# People

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