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THIRD INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

**Caribbean regional seminar on the implementation of the Third International
Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism: accelerating decolonization
through renewed commitment and pragmatic measures**

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DISCUSSION PAPER

PRESENTATION

BY

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US Federal Interference in Guam's Quest for Decolonization
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Si Yu'os Ma'åse na makombibida yu' mågi ta'lo para bai hu saonao gi este matua na dinanña'. Gi tinestigu-hu på'go, bai hu sangåni hamyo put i halacha na hiniyong gi islå-ku yan i kinalamten-måmi para in gi'ot i direchon-måmi komo taotao.

Your Excellency Chairwoman Keisha McGuire, distinguished delegates, representatives and experts from fellow Non-Self-Governing Territories, I am honored to be here again speaking before you on the topic of Guam and its continuing quest for decolonization. I also want to thank the government and people of Grenada for hosting us on their beautiful island.

In my statements today, I want to provide updates to various forms of US federal interference in Guam, that has created a great deal of confusion and anxiety within the community around the issues of political status change.

As a non-self-governing territory, Guam is accustomed to federal interference from the administering power. Since 2017 however, there has been a dramatic increase in this regard through legal challenges or military construction and buildup that directly, negatively impact the rights and resources of the Chamoru people, the indigenous people of Guam.

In 2011, a white man from the United States that had settled in Guam, Arnold "Dave" Davis filed a lawsuit challenging the legality of a non-binding decolonization plebiscite as defined by Government of Guam law. He argued that any plebiscite over Guam's status must be open to any US citizen residing in Guam, such as himself and including perhaps US military stationed on Guam.

In 2017, a federal judge decided in favor of Davis citing that the vote was unconstitutional. The Government of Guam has since appealed and is currently waiting for a decision from the appellate court. Last month, that same federal judge ruled that the Government of Guam must pay Davis close to \$1 million to cover his legal expenses.

2017 was also the same year that the US federal government filed suit to terminate a program aimed at providing restorative justice to thousands of Chamoru families made landless through the US military's land condemnation following World War II. The Chamorro Land Trust was implemented in 1995 and has since provided thousands of leases to landless Chamoru families. The US lawsuit alleges the program as being racist and violating the US federal housing act.

As the Chamoru people continually find their existence under assault by the US federal court system and government, they also find their ancestral lands dramatically impacted by US military construction and buildups. As I speak today, hundreds of acres of land in Guam are being cleared of beautiful jungle, and areas with rich cultural significance to the Chamoru people are being threatened by US plans to transfer thousands of US Marines to Guam and have them train there and in the islands to the north.

The importance of decolonization is becoming more and more acute. The US military has referred to Guam as the tip of the spear, under the current Trump administration, there is an increase in funds to support the US military industrial complex, but less and less to support social programs. The US federal court system seems determined to deny the Chamoru people any programs, symbolic or otherwise meant to provide some semblance of restorative justice.

Guam gained a moment of notoriety in August 2017, when a war of rhetoric broke out between the US and North Korea, with Guam as the primary target. This moment remains embedded in the minds of the people of Guam, in particular the Chamoru people. The US has for some time referred to Guam as the tip of its spear. This is the reality as a non-self-governing territory, to be relegated a weapon used by one world power to be brandished against others.

People on Guam seek a destiny not determined by such narrow strategic interest. Not the tip of the spear for one side of the Pacific Rim, levelled towards the other. But a bridge that can link East and West. We are denied this ability to be that bridge. We are denied that ability to build cooperative networks and partnerships in our region because of our political status.

Last month Guam was visited by representatives from the US Department of Interior, under the purview of which Guam and other territories fall. During meetings with Government of Guam leaders to discuss political status, the officials made clear that the start of any decolonization process required a plebiscite that met these conditions: 1. Any plebiscite taken over Guam's political status must be open to all residents, including US military stationed on the island. 2. Any plebiscite must include status quo or reminding a non-self-governing territory as an option on the ballot.

We can see here that discussions with the administering power are scarcely genuine or in good faith, but always determined by the need for the US to retain control over the island in a particular way. That for the US self-determination or decolonization of its strategically important territories, means finding a way to keep them in the same place, albeit with a new name.

As previously mentioned, the climate of interference by the administering power has led to disruptions in terms of educational campaigns on the topic of political status. The Davis case in particular has set back attempts at elevating the education knowledge of the island community for several years, due to fears of future lawsuits and crackdowns.

Representatives from all branches of the US government are on record denying that there are international dimensions to Guam's decolonization, and also seem to imply that any decolonization process is something that should be determined solely by the interests of the administering power.

As a means of helping to break this decolonial deadlock, I feel that a visiting mission to the island, to bring a greater attention to the issues I have mentioned today and beyond, would

be helpful in fostering increased engagement with the administering power and the people of Guam.

Si Yu'os Ma'åse and thank you for hearing my testimony today.