

## **Pacific Intervention on Demilitarization of Indigenous Lands and Waters**

### **Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues**

#### **Fourteenth session**

New York, 20 April-1 May 2015

April 21, 2015

#### Agenda Item 4

Presenter: Dakota Alcantara-Camacho, Guam

#### Submitted By:

**Guahan Coalition for Peace and Justice, Guam**

#### Supported By:

**We are Guahan, Guam; National Association of Social Workers, Guam Chapter; GALA, Inc.; Our Islands are Sacred, Guam; Na Koa Ikaika Kalahui Hawai'i; Akali Tange Association Papua New Guinea; and the Pacific Caucus**

Thank you Madame Chair,

According to Chamorro cosmology, in the beginning of the universe, Fo'na and Pontan, brother-sister spirits sacrificed their bodies to create the earth as we know it. We acknowledge that as we walk across the land, we walk over the bodies and bones of our ancestors. We honor our genealogies as our connection to the earth, and uphold our responsibility to our ancestors to maintain the sacred peace and balance gifted to us by the Creator.

I speak today on behalf of Pacific Caucus to call for an immediate halt to the militarization of the planet recognizing that the research and development of military technologies has exponentially increased the destruction of the earth and all our relatives. Theft of ancestral lands, environmental violence, and policies of cultural genocide have all been key ingredients in a recipe designed to feed foreign and domestic military control of our homelands. Our ancestral teachings tell us that we are all related and that any harm we cause to other beings, we also cause to ourselves.

### **I. Militarization of the Pacific**

Indigenous peoples (IPs) of the Pacific have long suffered the negative consequences of militarization stemming back to World War I, when settler governments established military bases in Australia, New Guinea, and Samoa. Countries like Guåhan, have been treated as

trophies of war, traded between Foreign governments such as when Spain ceded the island to the United States in the Treaty of Paris in 1898. During World War II, foreign powers battled each other in indigenous lands and innocent people were tortured, raped, and held hostage in our own countries and forced to participate in wars we did not ask for. This story resonates like the aftermath of a nuclear bomb across the waves of the Pacific in Hawai'i, Guåhan (Guam), the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the Republic of Belau, the Federated States of Micronesia, Wake Island, Midway Island, Australia, the Solomon Islands, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Timor Leste.

Due to domestic militarization, state governments have forced the indigenous to leave their homelands completely- as in the case of the peoples of Maluku who have been land dispossessed since 1951 and nearly four generations later are still displaced. IPs continue to struggle with the domestic and global repercussions of militarization and war and the threat of militarization is heightened in light of the United States announcement of its Pacific Pivot strategy in its efforts to maintain global dominance.

## **II. Impact of Militarization on Indigenous Peoples**

Militarization impacts indigenous peoples in various ways leading to further infringements on our right to cultural and political self-determination.

Many Pacific IPs have lost access to lands and natural resources of their homelands. Some have experienced land dispossession and displacement with the extreme violation of IP's rights in the case of Maluku, wherein people were sent for a "temporary stay" to the Netherlands since 1951 and remain dispossessed despite numerous actions with the intention of facilitating a return home. This phenomenon has also been experienced by the peoples of Rongelap and Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands, who were removed from their native islands for United States nuclear testing from 1946 to 1958. Others have experienced land grabs and occupation by state military forces on IP lands in West Papua, Fiji, Hawai'i, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, for example. On my homeland of Guåhan (Guam), the U.S. Department of Defense currently occupies one-third of my island and is seeking to increase their landholdings by an additional 2,200 acres on an island that is only 212 square miles. In Guåhan, the military hold behind their fence, our largest supply of fresh water that they now sell back to us, most recently issuing a proposal to increase prices by 800%. In the past month, the U.S. Department of Defense released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement revealing its plan to dramatically intensify its presence in the Commonwealth of the Mariana Islands by increasing its footprint on the island of Tinian to two-thirds and using the inhabited island of Pagan for a large firing range training complex. The expansion of military training exercises would severely limit local peoples access to adequate health care, affordable foods, and restrict travel during training operations, not to mention bringing live-fire training and heavy artillery to the 3,000 residents that live there.

These realities beg the question, “What impact will continued militarization of our lands have on our people?”

Militarization’s greatest threat to indigenous peoples is the potential for death as a result of enlistment in military service and civilian casualties of war. In the Pacific jurisdiction of West Papua, nearly 500,000 people have been killed in the process of West Papuans’ quest for self-determination and liberation from Indonesian military forces. Political activists have been tortured and murdered for nearly 50 years now. West Papua is one the most militarized jurisdictions in the Pacific with nearly 45,000 Indonesian troops and of that number, almost 1,000 are stationed at the border with Papua New Guinea. Military police have reportedly burned many civilian homes and cars and engaged in bayoneting innocent civilians. Military troops continue to violate West Papuans’ human rights that include sexual violence against women and girls. Disappearances, detentions, and executions continue today, threatening the very survival of the country’s indigenous peoples.

We are well aware that militarization ushers in land dispossession alongside environmental degradation and contamination. Military practices have zero regard for Mother Earth, as evidenced in the contamination of our lands, air, and water. The United States has multiple sites on it’s Superfund or CERCLA list that itemizes the country’s most toxic sites. Military bases comprise a significant proportion of these sites. In addition, the U.S. has identified Formerly Used Defense Sites that require clean-up. On Guahan’s Andersen Air Force and naval bases alone, there were over 95 toxic sites that were identified through the FUDS program for clean-up. Toxic and contaminated homelands have impacted the physical health and well-being of indigenous peoples.

IPs suffer from disproportionately higher rates of cancer and diabetes than non-indigenous peoples. My peoples’ rate of nasopharyngeal cancer, for example, is nearly 80 times higher than the U.S. national average for that type of cancer. In a study released by the Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, the villages of Santa Rita and Yigo were found to have the highest incidence rates for cancer; the two villages where U.S. military bases are located. In looking at our rates of diabetes, my island’s rate is five times the U.S. national rate.

### **III. Pacific Pivot of Militarization**

In 2011, the U.S. Obama Administration officially announced the ‘Pacific Pivot’ strategy, a massive expansion of aggressive military posturing in the Pacific region. As part of this strategy, the U.S. and its allies will increase their military presence on Guahan, Hawai’i, Australia, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and the Philippines. While the U.S. has decrease its overall defense budget in recent years, it has conversely increased its spending on Pacific defense activities. According to Captain Robert Lee, “We are seeing a realignment of forces away from Cold War theatres to Pacific theatres, and Guam is ideal for us because it is a

U.S. territory and therefore gives us maximum flexibility.” The reason given for the hyper-militarization of the Pacific region is the containment of China and North Korea. The Pivot involves bilateral agreements with Japan, which stipulates Guåhan as the site of joint training exercises, without obtaining free, prior, or informed consent from the island’s indigenous Chamorros. In fact, when the U.S. first announced its military build-up, the local community submitted over 10,000 comments largely denouncing the build-up- unprecedented in U.S. military history. Nonetheless, the U.S. government has already allocated money for construction projects and is proceeding with its current plans.

#### **IV. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The issue of militarization has been presented to the United Nations Permanent Forum on many occasions in the past, however, there has been little progress in movement towards a demilitarized world. Hence, the critical need to move forward to address and remedy the legacy of militarization and its concomitant decolonization remains. The Pacific Caucus offers the following recommendations to realize a demilitarized world:

1. That the Forum calls on member states to acknowledge their responsibility to ensure the UN Resolution on the Universal Realization of the Right of Peoples to Self-Determination is implemented by demilitarizing the lands and waters of indigenous peoples immediately. The referenced resolution declares “...firm opposition to acts of foreign military intervention, aggression and occupation, since these have resulted in the suppression of the right of peoples to self-determination and other human rights in certain parts of the world [and] *Calls upon* those States responsible to cease immediately their military intervention in and occupation of foreign countries and territories and all acts of repression, discrimination, exploitation and maltreatment...” and
2. That the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues works with member states towards the creation of *human security* for indigenous peoples as opposed to the constrictions of “national” or “military” security. Former Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi Annan defined *human security* stating:

“We must also broaden our view of what is meant by peace and security. Peace means much more than the absence of war. Human security can no longer be understood in purely military terms. Rather, it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.”

Hence, states should ensure that IPs have access to the basic necessities for life, as well as all that is needed to thrive and maximize their human potential. We recommend shifting conceptualizations of security to that of *genuine security*, wherein the physical

environment is able to sustain human and natural life; IP's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, health-care, and education are guaranteed; IP's fundamental human dignity is honored and our cultural identities are respected; and the natural environment is protected from avoidable harm.

Submitted: April 21<sup>st</sup>. 2015 New York