WRITTEN STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE THERESE M. TERLAJE

SPEAKER, 36TH GUAM LEGISLATURE,

*I MINA’TRENTAI SAIS NA LIHESLATURAN GUÅHAN*

TO THE UNITED NATIONS

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (FOURTH COMMITTEE)

ON THE QUESTION OF GUAM

October 6, 2021

Håfa Adai distinguished members of the United Nations Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) and Your Excellency Ms. Egriselda Aracely González López.

I am Therese M. Terlaje, Speaker of the 36th Guam Legislature. Si Yu’os Ma’åse’ and thank you for the opportunity to address this esteemed Committee for action on the question of decolonization of the non-self-governing territory of Guam under the Administering Authority, the United States of America.

The CHamoru people have been proud inhabitants and caretakers of the island of Guåhan (Guam) for over 4000 years. In that time our people have survived several deadly wars and 500 years of colonization and occupation by three separate foreign nations, including 120 years under the current Administering Authority. During this time of colonization, Guam’s precious resources, land and people were consistently exploited and used without the consent of the CHamoru people.

Self-determination is a fundamental inalienable right affirmed by the United Nations Charter. As is recognized by this Fourth Committee, the CHamoru people have not had the opportunity to fully and meaningfully exercise our right to self-determination on Guam free of outside rule or influence.

Paramount to self-determination is a non-self-governing people’s right to its own natural resources and the right to participate freely in any decision-making concerning those limited resources. Guam’s status limits its ability to forge independent economic and strategic partnerships with other nations particularly in our Pacific region. It is also critically important in this time of climate change that Guam, a small island, be allowed to protect its existing resources that will increase the absorption of carbon dioxide, increase the protection of shores against rising tides, and maintain its biodiversity as a hope for the future wellness and economic independence of its community. Our situation on Guam is urgent, as access and control of our resources is impeded by the delay in decolonization.

Studies have found over 100 contaminated sites on Guam. Almost all of these are from U.S. military activity and dumping, and result in the people of Guam’s continued exposure to many cancer-causing agents, including radiation from nuclear testing, Agent Orange, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs).

One third of Guam that the U.S. military controls and uses for its continued activity, expansion, and nuclear storage, includes areas above the aquifer, adjacent to the fresh water lake, and along the coast, while designated cleanup sites are ignored.

Guam has sought but been denied in U.S. compensation programs for radiation exposure despite high levels of cancer rates and findings by the Board on Radiation Effects Research (BRER) Committee that the people of Guam were exposed as downwinders of the U.S. nuclear testing in the Marshall Islands from 1945 to 1962. Similarly, the U.S. denies Agent Orange use on Guam during the war despite the accounts of military personnel admitting to staging, transporting, and spraying the herbicide on Guam.

In addition to demands for clean-up of contamination and compensation for the countless who have suffered illnesses as a result, the CHamoru people continue to insist on the protection of its ancient villages, limestone

forests, cultural and historic artifacts and sites, and ancient burial grounds that the U.S. military has either destroyed or restricted public access to with its expansion of military presence, testing or training on Guam and throughout the Pacific.

The U.S. military is building a Live-Fire Training Range Complex (LFTRC) on Guam near Ritidian/Litekyan, the site of a 3500-year-old ancient village, despite resistance and concern from many community members. The Live-Fire Training Range requires the removal of approximately 187 acres of some of the last remaining primary limestone forests, and the habitat for several endangered species found only in Guam and within the CNMI. The LFTRC expands the military footprint over a current wildlife refuge, fishing grounds and unique cultural sites, and proposes to cut off public access to the people of Guam for 273 days out of the 365 days of the year.

Additionally, roughly 867 acres of land have been bulldozed in what was known to be ancient villages and settlement areas of Måguak, Sabanan Fadang, Haputo, Pugua Point, Taguac, and Machanao to build a main cantonment area and living quarters for additional U.S. military personnel expected to occupy Guam. During this construction phase, we have seen dozens of discoveries of artifacts and human burials of at least 12 individuals from the Latte Period. These discoveries do not include the known historic sites that were already excavated and removed in the main cantonment area and LFTRC. It is possible that there may be even more historic artifacts or burials destroyed unknowingly or inadvertently during the clearing and grading that went undocumented given the complexity and size of the project. Unfortunately, we may never know what other historic resources were lost for future generations. And there are several more significant military projects planned over the next 5 years that will disturb ancient CHamoru villages and ancient burials. These historic sites and cultural landscapes are vital to the history, identity, and well-being of the CHamoru people. There may be many other important findings or historic sites within the surrounding area that should not be removed or built over, for these same reasons. Our historic sites must be preserved in place so that future generations may further solidify their ties to their heritage and land and have the opportunity to interpret the interaction of cultural practices and the environment that helped our ancestors thrive for over 4000 years.

In addition to our land, the surrounding oceans of Guam are its most precious resource and must be preserved and protected from activities that will threaten its ecosystems. In 2020, the U.S. Navy was authorized to use approximately 980,000 square nautical miles in the Pacific near Guam and the Marianas Islands as a “testing and training” area, further increasing the U.S. military’s footprint on Guam and limiting CHamoru’s access to fishing, cultural practices and recreation in its waters. The Mariana Islands Training and Testing (MITT) study area is permitted to use sonar and other transducers, explosives, and vessel use in our oceans. The 2020 MITT also allows 67,652 takings (kills) of 28 different marine mammal species (including whales and dolphins) per year for 7 years due to detonation, sonar, and other training and testing activity within the MITT. My concern is that while Guam struggles with contamination and other effects from past military activities, the MITT ushers in additional adverse effects from testing and training in our waters and lands according to our experts. The true cumulative environmental, cultural and social impacts of the proposed military activities which include the MITT, the Live Fire Training Range Complex, and other future and existing training activities have not been analyzed and considered in totality.

Guam’s island ecosystem and cultural practices continue to be adversely affected by the environmental and social impacts of detonation of explosives and use of sonar in biological habitat, and the cumulative contamination and hazards from years of military training and testing activity in important parts of our island’s land and waters. It is imperative that Guam’s land and water resources be protected from further harm in order that the known and unknown value of the island’s land and water diversity and unique natural resources remain a viable source of future prosperity for the CHamoru people and the residents of Guam.

The indigenous people of Guam cannot wait any longer for action on self-determination, particularly during this time when access to our natural, historic and cultural resources continues to be threatened. We urge the assistance of this distinguished committee in the protection of our resources and in ensuring the future sustainability and survival of the people of Guam, through a resolution demanding immediate protection of Guam’s resources by the Administering Authority and demanding immediate agreement of the Administering Authority on the Decolonization of Guam before any more resources are lost.

Sincerely,

Therese M. Terlaje

Speaker, 36th Guam Legislature