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Testimony
Before the Committee on Resources
United States House of Representatives

Oversight Hearing
On the
Guam War Claims Commission Report

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Testimony Presented to the House Committee on Resources

by

Felix P. Camacho
Governor of Guam

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify on the on the Guam War Claims Review Commission report. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in this important process to help recognize the struggles of our people during an extraordinarily difficult period in our history.

First I want to thank the 106th and the 107th Congresses for recognizing the need to revisit the war claims issues that have been long outstanding for the people of Guam.

I want to commend the War Claims Review Commission for the work they did over 120 days to complete what was started in 1945. There was a monumental task to piece together findings that have passed through numerous commissions and studies spanning close to six decades. Chairman Mauricio J. Tamargo, Vice Chairman Antonio R. Unpingco, Mr. Robert J. Lagomarsino, Mr. Benjamin J. Cruz and Ms. Ruth G. Van Cleve have shown a level of commitment worthy of their responsibility to finally bestow upon the survivors the recognition they have deserved and sought for nearly 60 years.

The Commission performed a tremendous feat in the preparation of the report in a compressed time frame, especially considering the difficulty of tracking old records housed in facilities across the nation. Despite these challenges, however, the Commission created a valuable document that includes a number of critical recommendations to finally bring a sense of closure to a sensitive and emotional issue.

More than 22,000 Chamorros lived through 32 months of Japanese occupation during World War II. Throughout this period, our people endured indignities and suffered through forced labor, concentration camps and atrocities at the hands of the Japanese Imperial Army. Yet their stories have not been recognized by our nation and efforts to compensate families for these devastating losses have not been successful.

The report examines numerous war claims statutes in reference to the 1948 Guam War Claims Act and identifies numerous problems with the Guam law. Though compensation was available to families who suffered injuries, death or property losses, the shortened application period and inadequate notice of the program made it difficult for many Guamanians to receive awards for claims certain requirements of the law, such as the need for Congressional approval of grants greater than \$5,000, also prevented some families from collecting amounts to fairly compensate them for their losses.

The Commission proposes to address these inadequacies with new funding and claims program requirements to provide compensation to our people for the terrible events they suffered during World War II. While I know that no amount of money can ever replace a loved one, and no compensation can truly make up for the atrocities endured, this compensation is critical to our people. The act of paying the claims is an official recognition of the brutality that occurred and more importantly, the people who experienced that brutality.

I fully support the Commission's recommendations to address the issue of recognizing the atrocities committed on the Chamorro people. While no program will satisfy everyone, we must agree on a system to finally lay this issue to rest for the remaining survivors and their families.

I also commend the United States Congress for their recognition of the need to finally address the lack of parity for Chamorro war claims and ask that they continue with the commitment to see this effort through. The critical step of review and recommendations has been completed. However, the real commitment comes from the actions that are now before this body.

I also would like to emphasize that this report, as significant as it is, is only another step on the long path to resolution of the war claims dilemma that the people of Guam have been seeking for six decades. The implementation of the Commission's recommendations must provide the impetus for even greater recognition of the suffering of the Chamorro people during World War II. With the exception of the Philippine Islands, no other inhabited U.S. land has ever experienced occupation. No other American civilian population has ever experienced the hardship of forced labor, concentration camps, beatings and massacre as a result of the United States' involvement in World War II. These atrocities must be addressed to the fullest extent possible.

The people of Guam have entrusted Guam's Delegate to Congress, the Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo, to represent the best interest of our survivors. I look to Delegate Bordallo with great confidence to carry this effort forward. I ask that you support her and the people of Guam, who

have waited nearly 60 years for recognition by our nation of the atrocities thrust upon them for the simple fact that they were loyal Americans.

Thank you again for your commitment to your fellow Americans in Guam.

Si Yu'os Ma'ase.