

**For the GA Report of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief  
Indigenous Peoples and the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief**

**Curtis J. Jewell**

[Curtis.J.Jewell@gmail.com](mailto:Curtis.J.Jewell@gmail.com)

**Dietrix Jon Ulukoa Duhaylonsod**

[ulukoa.kealapono@gmail.com](mailto:ulukoa.kealapono@gmail.com)

**Adahi I Manaotao-ta Mo'na**

**Guahanom**

**Independent Guåhan**

**Mana'adahi Coalition**

**Måsu**

**Prutehi Hila'an**

**Prutehi Litekyan/Save Ritidian**

**The Right of the CHamoru People to Maintain Their Traditional Beliefs**

Hafa Adai todū hamyu, and a warm greeting especially to the Special Rapporteur and to our Indigenous relatives who have worked diligently to share their thoughts for this special report. Si Yu'os Ma'åse; we thank you all. We are Curtis J. Jewell and Dietrix Jon Ulukoa Duhaylonsod, two sons of the Mariana Islands, beloved home of Maga'lahi Taga, the great Chief Taga. We submit this letter of input on behalf of our CHamoru people and of the Indigenous CHamoru Organizations which look out for us all.

Our CHamoru people are the Indigenous Mariana Islanders, the first of the long-distance Pacific seafarers, having settled the oceanic continent over 4000 years ago, establishing a powerful matrilineal society throughout our archipelago. According to tradition, we descend from our venerated first ancestors Pontan (Puntan) and Fo'na (Fu'una), who also gave of themselves to create our islands. Although we have undergone centuries of colonization by foreigners, and although our people today are practitioners of all the major world religions, our belief in ancestral veneration has endured. It is important to our being that we continue to visit and honor all our ancestors, from our recently deceased to all our manaotao mo'na, all those who came before us, and this profound respect extends to our land, sea, and sky, which are physical manifestations of the love received from our first ancestors.

The CHamoru practice of paying our respects to our ancestors and ancestral sites is a human right, an Indigenous right, and a civil right, protected by the UDHR, UNDRIP, and ICCPR. However, as a powerless territory of the United States and a minority of its national population, our right to visit and honor our ancestors and ancestral sites is continually obstructed by federal restrictions. We exhort the UN to support our recommendations:

1. The United States should acknowledge that the entire Mariana archipelago belongs to its Indigenous CHamoru people despite the division of two flags imposed by foreign governments. Knowing this truth, CHamoru people should be allowed to visit all their ancestral islands, from Guam in the south to Urakus, or Farallon de Pajaros, in the north. Live fire exercises should cease immediately because they prevent any kind of CHamoru reconnection.

2. The United States should include the CHamoru people in the verbiage of NAGPRA, NHPA, and other related laws to ensure that traditional CHamoru beliefs and practices are protected in all matters of cultural heritage preservation. Inclusion in the verbiage of these laws does not lessen or take away the CHamoru right to self-determination.
3. Archaeologists, developers, and officials at all levels of government working in the Marianas should respect and yield to the traditional beliefs and practices of the Indigenous CHamoru people. This means allowing cultural descendants meaningful consultation at all stages of land altering projects. This also means protecting ancestral remains and cultural sites from destruction and ensuring access to these by the CHamoru people.
4. The United Nations should support repatriation efforts of the CHamoru people working to recover artifacts, cultural properties, and especially ancestral remains, from archives, storage facilities, and museums outside the Marianas.
5. The United Nations and the United States should support Guam's Commission on Decolonization and any similar future entities throughout the Marianas until CHamoru self-determination is realized. The historical lack of CHamoru self-determination has rendered our people powerless in our own islands. The political interests of the federal government do not prioritize our traditional CHamoru practices and beliefs. Ignoring or dismissing these rights is detrimental to our Indigenous identity.

Our recommendations are buttressed by UNDRIP Article 11 which outlines our “right to practise and revitalize [our] cultural traditions and customs [...] to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of [our] culture,” and by Article 12 which confirms our “right to manifest, practise, develop and teach [our] spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to [our] religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of [our] ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of [our] human remains.”<sup>i</sup> Furthermore, Article 12 maintains that “States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned.” Other Articles in the UNDRIP, UDHR, and ICCPR promote these thoughts.

Unfortunately, significant damage has already been inflicted on our traditional practices and beliefs as well as our ancestral remains and cultural sites. The trend continues as familial claims to our native lands and waters are erased in the name of development. Our current political status quo keeps us perpetually incapacitated to make significant change. Therefore, we point out UNDRIP Article 3 which says that “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” If our people can regain sovereign stewardship of our ancestral islands, we have a better chance to ensure that our traditional practices and beliefs are protected.

We thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns and recommendations.  
Na'tachu i latte. Set the housepost upright.

---

<sup>i</sup> United Nations Declaration on the Right of Indigenous People, 2007.