

## **I Mina'trentai Tres Na Liheslaturan Guåhan Inaugural Address**

***Delivered by Speaker Judith T. Won Pat, Ed.D.  
January 5, 2015***

Buenas yan Hafa Adai, my dear people of Guam:

Our ancestors discovered these islands over 4,000 years ago and governed a balanced and sustainable society for generations. They were a matrilineal people, led by strong women who cared deeply for their island community, but more importantly, their leaders were driven by a sense of responsibility and a commitment to their families and this island. They were courageous and loved this place unconditionally, reminding us that we, too, must be bold and driven by love. Today, we are here to uphold this ancient legacy. From them, we have the inherent power to make our island the home we want it to be.

What is power? Some believe that money is power. Others believe that power is derived from influence and respect. Some see power as exhibiting dominance or control over others. I believe that power comes from the ability and confidence to achieve the goals we set for ourselves. I believe that as a people, we have the potential to be powerful. Many people see Guåhan as a tiny little island in the middle of the ocean; a small dot on a map. Some believe that we are powerless and dependent on the United States for federal aid and imported goods. I believe that we have always had the ability to sustain our people and our way of life, just as our ancestors did for thousands of years before European colonization. However, we must be courageous and willing to invest in ourselves if we wish to achieve our full potential.

Today, we have taken an oath to serve our island for the next two years. What are we going to do with the time we have been given? We have an opportunity to be powerful – not to abuse power, but to create it, together. Now, more than ever, we must be aware of our collective power and use it to ensure that as Guam changes in the years to come, it doesn't become a place we will no longer recognize, a place that serves the desires of others. Instead, we must ensure that we are able to meet the needs of our people first. Otherwise, we run the risk of displacing our people from our home, because they can no longer afford to live here.

Change can be challenging, especially when it is forced on a community. There are many changes on the horizon that we did not choose for ourselves and that we are not entirely prepared for. Congress recently approved funding to begin construction for the military build-up. And while this brings money to the island, it doesn't come with a guarantee that the money will be used to improve our way of life. What is guaranteed is that our population is going to grow at an unnatural rate, and that our government services will

need to keep up. This Legislature will have to figure out how to fund upgrades to our utilities, our schools, and our public services and ensure that the impact from the incoming population doesn't affect the already strained services we provide to our own people. Are we prepared? Can we afford this? If not, we must stand firm together and demand real commitments from the Federal government to off-set these costs. We must take steps to ensure that these changes are good for Guam and not just for the Department of Defense.

As an unincorporated territory, we often cower away from demanding the rights and respect we deserve from the United States. In definition, our political status renders us powerless, and we hide behind this curtain of insecurity, allowing ourselves to be overlooked. We have to stop hiding in our fears and let the light in. It is time for our people to move forward, but we are stuck in this defeatist mentality that pursuing a better political destiny for Guam would be fruitless or impossible.

The term "unincorporated territory" literally means that we are a possession of the United States and we are excluded from the table at which decisions are made about our island and our lives. Our people and this great island are not mere possessions of the United States Government. We are a community of mothers and fathers who work hard, sons and daughters who make sacrifices, we are families and friends who look out for each other and we deserve better. We must recognize that our political status makes us powerless in this system; it allows the United States Government to treat us as second-class citizens. We must demand more.

We are our own greatest obstacle toward achieving political freedom through self-determination, but today I am making a commitment to change this and I need all of you to join me. We continue to make promises to hold a plebiscite by a certain date, but can never achieve this because we do so little to engage our community about self-determination. Instead of pushing for a plebiscite in two years, we should spend the next two years committing real resources – funding and staff – to a community-based education campaign about self-determination that is not run by political appointees, but rather by people who are knowledgeable and qualified to facilitate this important community dialogue. We need to work with our educational institutions to localize our curriculum, and teach our children about the power within them. I need both the Legislature and the Administration to work with me on this. Self-determination cannot be a political promise that is never fulfilled, because it is a human right we must seize. We owe it to ourselves and more importantly, to our children to fight for the freedom to decide our own destiny.

As senators, we make the laws that impact every person on this island. The 32nd Guam Legislature accomplished a great deal – we passed measures to rebuild and modernize our island's schools, raise the minimum wage, purchase more police cars to keep our streets safe, renovate our hospital, and so much more. Imagine what we can do this term. We are not perfect, but we are committed to getting it right and our doors are always open to the people. To those who are dissatisfied, I enthusiastically invite you to walk into our offices

and work with us. The late Speaker Ben Pangelinan had the words: “the people’s office” posted above his doors for years, reminding the community that we are the people’s representatives and that our space is yours, too. As leaders on Guam, we have always been easily accessible to our constituents, because our community is closely interconnected. We govern in the spirit of inafa’maolek and ina’gofli’e – reciprocity and friendship. Let us conquer our challenges collectively, for that ... is where our power lies.

Guam needs a strong, hard-working, full-time Legislature to ensure balance in our government. We are one of three equal branches that share the same roots and need each other to thrive and grow. I am very excited to work with the Governor and the Chief Justice to strengthen the unity of our government. Governor Calvo and Chief Justice Torres, let’s meet regularly so that we can serve our people better ... together.

The world is watching the Pacific, and not as a place of peace as our name suggests, but as a place to prepare for war. This cannot be our only purpose in the world. We have to put our internal bickering aside and creatively explore a greater destiny for our people. In the past 60 years alone we have become almost solely dependent on ships to bring in our food. As shipping costs continue to rise, this is becoming more and more impractical. I am committed to identifying resources that will support the growth of permaculture on our island. Expanding local farms and growing our own food not only enhances our economy, but also promotes a healthier community. It is an investment that we must take seriously. I am also committed to working with the Governor to address the need to continue appeals to remove federal restrictions that prevent us from trading within our region.

For thousands of years our ancestors had healthy trade relationships with our neighboring islands. Since we have been under the authority of other countries, which are far away from our shores, we have lost our connection to the sea and to the islands we share our waters with. As the tides literally rise around us, sinking our sister islands, and causing global concern, we must strengthen our regional ties and take part in regional conversations and decisions. We are plagued with many of the same challenges, yet we are not sitting at the same table when regional leaders make collective decisions. The United States represents us in major regional forums and in treaties concerning our island’s relationship with our neighbors. I am actively working to change this by reaching out to regional leaders and proposing ways we can work together more directly. For example, with the support of the governors throughout our region, I have begun soliciting grants to research the possibility of a Regional Health Care Plan, which will provide health insurance to Compact of Free Association migrants funded by their home islands and Compact-Impact money.

Next year, our island has an incredible opportunity to enhance our connection to the rest of the Pacific as we host the Festival of the Pacific Arts. A delegation of 2,500 performers, artists, and cultural practitioners from 27 Pacific Islands will be coming to Guam to share their traditional and contemporary art forms. This is one of the largest celebrations of

indigenous cultures in the world, and will attract thousands of visitors to our island. It is a wonderful opportunity for us to promote our unique native arts and traditions, and for our community to learn more about the richness of our oceanic peoples and cultures. We must use opportunities like this to inspire our children. The more they know about their unique place in the world, the more they will value themselves and our island.

I took an oath today, with the spirit and promise of our children uplifting me to serve our island with a deep sense of purpose and optimism. For their sake, let us be bold and courageous. Let us lead with confidence and ability, remembering that smallness is a state of mind. Collectively, we are powerful. Our civilization has endured hundreds of years of colonial rule and we are still here. Let us not settle for less than we deserve. Join me as we move forward into the future. Let us use all the power within us to ensure that Guam will always be a place our children can call home.

Dankolo na Si Yu'os Ma'ase.