

DPL Scholarship

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Should Article 12 be maintained, abolished, or amended and why?

Article XII, Restrictions on Alienation of Land, is a law that restricts the ownership of land in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to those of Northern Mariana Descent (NMD). It protects the financial statuses of its people and should be maintained by only allowing its descendants to be the rightful owners. Allowing foreigners, or others, to own land in any of the Northern Mariana Islands, increases the risk that outsiders may soon have more control than NMD's, while at the same time, forcing rightful owners out and leading them to establish homes elsewhere. With Northern Mariana Descendants being the sole proprietors of land in the CNMI, we are an essential constituent of the growth of the economy. Article XII was thoughtfully drafted by our leaders, and has since helped to protect us from exploitation, encourage economic advancement and self-sufficiency for our people, and preserve the culture and traditions of Chamorros and Carolinians. Article XII was a wise decision made by the thirty-nine elected delegates, and voters, over forty years ago, and should continue to maintain for the future years to come.

Our island's history is more than just years of colonization by power hungry countries; it is more than just a strategic location for another country's plans. Instead, it is a small chain of islands, in the middle of the Pacific, that is cherished and rightfully belongs to the indigenous people; of Chamorros and Carolinian heritage. Our cultural practices of fishing, hunting, and

farming are all due to our access to the bountiful natural resources that surround us. It is what has sustained us for all these years. Amending Article XII raises the matter of urbanization and the depletion of our resources. If not done sustainably, development and urbanization can greatly affect the natural resources that we heavily rely on for our nutritional needs and livelihoods.

This very land holds a history, a history rich in culture and tradition, and is built on the strength of our indigenous people. This is the land I call home that is of sentimental value to me, and I am sure that it holds the same value for other generations of Chamorros and Carolinians as well. Land is an integral part of culture and traditions; it is sacred as it is connected to the origins of cultures and traditions everywhere. The land and ocean that make up the CNMI is responsible for our ways of life. We should always honor and protect the roots that we came from, “I Aire, I Hånom, yan I Tåno’.”

When we take into consideration our sister and brother island nations, such as Hawaii and Guam, we can fully grasp the detrimental damages that our leaders were trying to protect us from. Indigenous peoples of Hawaii and Guam are now facing the challenges that arise from exploitation and alienation of their land. Yes, economic development is clearly evident, but if the indigenous people are unable to financially keep up with the increasing property tax and increasing costs of living expenses that come with development, then all of this gain is at the cost of who? For example, the vacation rental unit (VRU) industry in Hawaii is a major concern because “they limit the supply of available housing to locals and Native Hawaiians”; “the issue with VRUs is that many of these are owned by non resident buyers -- on Maui alone, 52% of homes are sold to nonresidents, and 60% of condos and apartments have gone to investors and second homeowners” (Magbual, n.d.). This is only one of the driving factors for Native Hawaiian homelessness in Hawaii. In many other cases around the world, investors tend to buy

out the locals who are unable to keep up with the costs, ultimately resulting in them leaving their home for a more affordable lifestyle.

Lastly, the reason I feel so strongly about maintaining Article XII is because I worry for the future generation of the NMI. Land is not just a plot on the map, it is a piece of our family's history that gets passed down generation to generation. It is where we connect with our ancestors and where we learn the ways of the past. Where we will build familial connections and establish roots and traditions that will be remembered and honored for many years. Where I will one day pass down to my children, and to my children's children. If Article XII were to be amended or abolished, the future of Northern Mariana Descendants, the cultural practices and traditions, will surely be uncertain. As I mentioned earlier, and as we all should understand by now, our land is more than just a strategic location on a map, it is the legacy we leave behind for future generations to accept, appreciate, and cherish; like we all have.

References

Magbual, N. Paradise for Tourists, a Struggle for Natives: Native Hawaiian Homelessness in the Introduction Hawaiian Islands. *HUMBIO 122*.