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SECOND INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR THE ERADICATION OF COLONIALISM

Pacific Regional Seminar on the implementation of the Second
International Decade for the Eradication of
Colonialism: priorities for action

Yanuca, Fiji
28 to 30 November 2006

STATEMENT BY
THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF
AMERICAN SAMOA
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LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
IPULASI AITOFELE SUNIA'S

STATEMENT

Of the
Territory of American Samoa

Before

The United Nations Special Committee of Twenty-Four

Nadi, Fiji

November 28-30, 2006

The position of the people of American Samoa and its duly elected legislative representatives and government officials, is that the current status of the Territory and the United States Government is the desired relationship we wish to have.

Our people have a long history of cooperation with the people of the United States, and many of our citizens now live within the United States, have received their education there, and/or served in the United States Armed Forces. It has been a partnership that has aided both of our peoples and the bonds of friendship between us are strong. We ask again that American Samoa be delisted as a "colony" of the United States.

Many territories have been identified as "non-self governing" by the United Nations. It must be understood that "one size does not fit all" and we of American Samoa do not see ourselves as belonging to this group. Our Territory is self-governing and has had an elected legislature for over 40 years. The Governor and Lieutenant Governor have been elected since 1978 and we have an elected Congressman in the U.S. Congress. It is important to the Committee, to be sensitive to the desires of the local people within your identified "territories" of the world. It is a question of self-determination, and each individual situation needs to be viewed according to the desires of the local population. Colonization is a world concept that only has real meaning when the issue of self-determination is understood relative to the people directly involved.

American Samoa is an unincorporated U.S. Territory and in previous seminars, before your committee, it has been made clear that we prefer our current status. A large American Samoa delegation presented this opinion at your 2001 meeting in Havana, Cuba, with a resolution endorsed during a Town Meeting in the Territory. This demonstrated that our local population desire to retain our political status with the U.S. We are independent within a federalized system, of self-governing states and territories. Federal agencies and programs are designed to bring a self-governing territory, such as American Samoa, together with other states and territories for their common good. We have self-determination over our own local affairs and work with the federal government on issues of collective importance, such as protection of ocean resources and foreign affairs.

We have our problems. We face rapid population growth, migration patterns that are not conducive to a healthy economic and living environment, limited natural resources and the challenge of developing in such an isolated place. On the other hand, American Samoa is the "tuna capital" of the world. We are not a colony of the United States, but a possession that was freely acquired through treaty. We have our own laws and constitution that are not attached to the United States; however, we also support the fundamental rights of the United States Constitution. Support is provided to us through a rightful share in U.S. federal funds that has helped our territorial government build a quality medical center, expand educational opportunities and provide a wide range of road and infrastructure improvements. These federal grants help support our development, employ our people in meaningful jobs, and raise the general welfare standards for all our people.

Our islands need basic infrastructure to encourage development of self-sustaining industrial and commercial growth. Roads and utilities are constantly expanding through our own efforts and the partnership of U.S. federal programs. This is providing the foundation for a healthy economy. While we may wish to grow in prosperity, our cultural traditions are of paramount importance. This is an area of immense pride and those who have traveled through our islands, can attest to our steadfast safeguarding of our traditions. The environment is also an area to be safeguarded, and the partnership we have formed with U.S. federal agencies allows us to forcefully move to protect our coral reefs, natural wetlands and rural landscape. We have unique and beautiful lands, and waters. Direct involvement locally by the U.S. Park Service has preserved key natural areas for not only the enjoyment of our people, but for visitors from throughout the world.

Look at our islands and you will see that we have control of our destiny. The United States is a partner in our development and our efforts to preserve our culture and natural environmental assets. These efforts have met with success. Grants received from U.S. federal programs are provided to aid us in meeting our needs as we define them, just like any other area of the United States and its possessions. We are part of the United States, and we are not seeking to end that partnership, but to make it more fulfilling for both partners.

American Samoa has an ongoing process for review of our political status that is sensitive to the opinions of our local population. This process was initiated in the year 2001 with the previously mentioned Town Meeting, the outcome of which was the overwhelming consensus that the population desired to retain its political relationship and status with the United States. Earlier this year, our Legislature passed the Administration's proposed Future Political Status Study Act which established an eleven member Future Political Status Study Commission.

Soon after the Commission membership were appointed and assembled, the Commission proceeded to call public hearings in which members of the public at large, as well as elected and non-elected officials of American Samoa, were invited to voice their positions on the issue of American Samoa's political status for the future.

The Commission has since journeyed outside the confines of our borders to observe and gather information on political statuses of other Territories and countries within our region, including the Republic of Belau, Saipan, the Independent State of Samoa and the U.S. Territory of Guam. The Commission has also sought the input of residents of the United States who are of American Samoan ancestry in states such as California, Washington and Hawai'i. Within the island groups in Micronesia, the Commission met with government officials and private residents regarding the unique political statuses therein. In the Independent State of Samoa, the Commission met with the Prime Minister and other members of parliament to discuss their independent state status. Informal 'town meetings' were held with churches and community leaders in the

United States in order to gauge non-resident citizen response to American Samoa's future political status.

The Commission's final report will be submitted to the Governor by December 31, 2006. Preliminary reports from the Commission indicate that the overwhelming majority opinion expressed by residents of American Samoa, as well as American Samoans living abroad, is to retain the present political relationship with the United States of America.

Therefore, we ask respectfully that this Committee please review the colonial issue, keeping in mind the wishes of the people directly impacted, and support self-determination for those that truly need it.