



**INDEPENDENCE:** To exercise self-government over one's territory and population; to have sovereignty and have that sovereignty recognized by others. There are close to 200 independent countries in the world today.

Independence does not mean isolation. Independence instead allows Guam to enter a network of global interdependence, as an equal partner, rather than a possession of another.

Since World War II, more than 90 former colonies have chosen to become independent. In the 20th century, among former colonies, independence was overwhelmingly the most favored future political status option, with very few colonies choosing to become integrated with their former colonizer.

There is no correlation between the size (in terms of land mass or population) and the prosperity of an independent country. There is also no standard by which a colony has become "mature" enough to govern itself. All of those ideas are myths and remnants of colonial propaganda.

Two countries, which are regularly ranked as being among the top ten richest in the world are similar to Guam in terms of size. Singapore, whose land mass is only slightly larger than Guam's (278 sq. miles) is considered to be the third richest country in the world. Luxemburg, which has a population of less than 500,000, is considered to be the fourth richest country in the world. These nations are successful because of the abilities that independence provides them in terms of taking advantage of and best utilizing their natural and human resources, as well as their location.

Although the United Nations only recognizes 17 official colonies in the world today, there are still dozens of places around the world, where people are still pushing for decolonization and independence. Places such as Scotland, Puerto Rico, Catalonia, Greenland and Okinawa all have active independence movements.

"Those who defend Guam's colonial status argue that economic independence for Guam is impractical. We happen to agree. Guam by herself can never be economically independent. But nor can our great mother country the United States. There no longer is any such animal as an independent nation in the world today ... All nations ... are economically interdependent." - Former Guam Senator Frank Lujan



## Nihi ta Fanguentos put “INDEPENDENCE” Let’s Talk Independence

In visualizing an independent Guåhan, we must consider the Seventh Generation principle. Native peoples throughout the world have a belief that in making decisions, people must consider how the decision will impact their descendants seven generations from now — or 175 years into the future. Since an important part of who we are as Chamoru people is to pay respect to our elders and the spirits of our ancestors, it is only fitting for us to also think of how our ancestors from seven generations before us would react to our decisions. Ask, “Would our mañaina give us their blessing?”

When talking with others about independence, remember that because our island has been colonized for nearly 500 years, it is going to take time, research, imagination, and lots of dialogue to keep this conversation going. Inspire the people you approach to imagine how Guåhan can improve, prosper, and thrive as an independent nation. Ask them to imagine the possibilities first, and then try to tackle the obstacles together. One of the first ways to bring up independence is by finding out what independence means to the person you are talking with. Ask, “What does independence mean to you?”

At the heart of people’s fears about independence is the unknown. Flip that scenario into what they do know. Ask questions that help people explore solutions. Look to Guåhan’s past and present to inspire a vision for the future. For example, on the issue of food security, here are potential questions to ask and possible responses:

“How much of our food is imported?” (Over 95 percent.)

“Do you believe we can produce a lot of our own food?” (Of course, we did it for most of our history.)

“How long ago was our island completely self-sufficient? (Just 70 years ago, or before World War II.)

“Where did people farm before the War?” (The land the U.S. military currently occupies — nearly 1/3 of our island — was used for ranches, where our people grew their food. When these lands were taken, most families stopped farming.)

“Do you know what our island’s leading industry was before World War II?” (The exportation of copra.)

“Why are Guåhan’s imported goods so expensive?” (U.S. policies like the Jones Act restrict where goods come from, making them more expensive, and in the case of produce, less fresh.)

“What types of economic gains would our island experience if we had control of our port?” (U.S. control of our port has meant that Guåhan does not profit from the ships that come through here, limiting our gains. As an independent nation, we would benefit from the fees charged to ships who refuel here, deliver goods, etc. We would become a strategic hub for trade in the region.)

For people who believe there should be a status quo option on the plebiscite. Ask questions like,

“When the U.S. Federal Government, the Department of Defense, and the Department of the Interior make decisions for Guam, do you believe they consider the direct needs of you and your family? Who do they consider in their decisions?

What are their priorities when they make decisions that will impact your life?”

And, “If Guåhan were independent, what would be our priorities?”

Many people hesitate to support independence because they feel it means they will have to give up their current lifestyle, or that they may lose more than they will gain. It is important to reassure them that independence really means that Guåhan will have the ability to decide what type of lifestyle we want. As an independent nation, we can choose our own government, industries, allies, and so much more. Some worry that because Guam is so small, we will not be able to protect ourselves from being conquered by a larger country. However, as an independent nation, we will have a greater ability to foster peaceful relationships with our regional neighbors that will translate into enhanced security for our island. And if we feel it is necessary to maintain a U.S. military presence, as an independent nation, we will have the power and the voice to negotiate the terms and benefits of this presence. Independence will give Guåhan the decision-making power it needs to shape a better future.

A good response to most, “How are we going to be able to ... ?” questions is to pose the question back to the person you are speaking to, and together come up with answers. When you are both stuck on something that you don’t know about, encourage one another to look it up and come back together to keep the conversation flowing.