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**Northern Marianas Residents Challenge Destruction of Their Homeland
by Navy Live-fire Plan**

*The U.S. Navy failed to consider the intense disruption to communities
and the environmental destruction that would result from training 5,000 Marines
on Tinian and Pagan.*

Plans by the U.S. Navy to transfer 5,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam and begin staging massive, live-fire war games on the islands of Tinian and Pagan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands would severely disrupt communities on Tinian and shatter the dreams of families who want to return to live permanently on Pagan.

Earthjustice — representing the Tinian Women’s Association, Guardians of Gani, PaganWatch and the Center for Biological Diversity — is challenging this plan. In a complaint filed today, the groups say the Navy failed to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act by not considering all the impacts associated with the relocation and training in a single environmental impact statement and not evaluating alternative stationing and training locations that could accomplish the Marines’ mission with far fewer environmental impacts.

The training proposed for Tinian and Pagan would be intense and destructive. War games would include artillery, mortars, rockets, amphibious assaults, attack helicopters and warplanes and, on Pagan, ship-to-shore naval bombardment. The training would destroy native forests and coral reefs, kill native wildlife — including endangered species — and destroy prime farmland.

Communities on Tinian — mostly indigenous Chamorro and low-income residents — would be subjected to high-decibel noise, as well as restricted access to traditional fishing grounds, cultural sites and recreational beaches. Cultural and historic sites would be destroyed. Indigenous Chamorro and Refaluwasch (Carolinian) families evacuated from Pagan in 1981 would never be able to return, their former home turned into a militarized wasteland.

“I spent many happy years of my childhood growing up on Pagan,” said Cinta M. Kaipat of PaganWatch. “Close family members of mine were there when the volcano erupted in 1981 and were forced to flee. Many of us want to return and resettle Pagan. For

those who lived there, Pagan remains their homeland. We do not want to see it obliterated by the military.”

Tinian is a small island with a population of just over 3,000. Currently, the only live-fire training conducted there is limited to a sniper target range. No training currently takes place on Pagan, a remote island that has been largely uninhabited since a volcanic eruption in 1981 forced evacuation of the local population. Many former residents and their children would like to return to live on the island.

The groups represented by Earthjustice have been fighting this proposal since it was first made public in 2013.

“When the Northern Marianas agreed to remain part of the United States, destroying the northern two-thirds of our island with live-fire training and bombing was never part of the deal,” said Florine Hofschneider of the Tinian Women’s Association. “We refuse to accept the Navy’s plans to subject our children to nearly constant bombardment.”

“The Navy’s decision would have devastating consequences for the people of Tinian and Pagan,” said Earthjustice attorney David Henkin. “The National Environmental Policy Act requires the Navy to take a hard look at *all* of the impacts associated with relocating 5,000 Marines to Guam and to look at alternative ways to accomplish its goals *before* making such a decision. The Navy blatantly violated those mandatory legal duties when it decided to station Marines on Guam without any consideration of the destruction from live-fire training the Navy claims those Marines will need or of other places those Marines could be trained with far fewer impacts.”

Resources:

Guest [blog post](#) by Northern Islands Mayor Jerome Kaipat Aldan
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