

## Pacific Islanders Defend Nuclear-Free Constitution

Can the people of Balau (also known as Palau) continue to withstand efforts by the United States to impose nuclear-equipped military bases in their islands?

The Balau Islands, the most western cluster of the Caroline Group, are located 500 miles east of the Philippines. In 1979, 92 per cent of the voters in Balau approved history's first nuclear-free constitution. Since then the United States has used its United Nations Trusteeship powers over Balau to force seven more elections on the nuclear-free issue. In the most recent vote, held at the end of June, the people of Balau again rejected changes in their nuclear-free constitution.

The United States government opposes the anti-nuclear provision because it stands in the way of the development on U.S. military bases in the islands. The United States has promoted a Compact of Free Association between itself and Balau which would provide millions of dollars of economic aid in exchange for the right to develop a naval base, store conventional and nuclear weapons, create a jungle warfare training reserve, and use the islands' airstrips. In May, Ivedual Yutaka Gibbons, the traditional High Chief of Balau, came to the United States to testify before the United Nations Trusteeship Council and to request assistance to uphold his country's constitution and resist military development. He told SAIIC:

"How many times must we say no? I am speaking on behalf of the traditional chiefs of Balau. We prefer to live in peace. During World War II, which was between two other nations, we were the victims. We can't forget that terrible war between the world powers.

"Today we are under a great deal of pressure to push for this plebiscite. The government has cut off all basic needs of the people of Balau. Our water and electricity have been cut

off. Our only radio station, which is owned by the government, has been shut down. There is a lot of threatening going on in Balau now pressing to approve this Compact.

"We are very concerned because the military will have the power to take land. In the Compact, the government would only have to give 60 days notice to take land.

"All these years we have been in a trust relationship with the United States. During this time, we have looked forward to the United States assisting us in developing our economy. But today, the only economy we have is based on government jobs. We have been learning about democracy and in addition we have our own system of traditional government. We thought that blending the two together we would be able to develop our economy, but we realize today that the United States is more interested in what it gets in its own self-interest.

"It is our request that the United States carry out its responsibility under the trusteeship agreement to make Balau economically, politically, and socially strong. The United States must also respect our constitution and our traditions. We want the entire world to know we are supporting world peace, and we are demonstrating it by maintaining the nuclear-free provision in our constitution."

Accompanying Chief Gibbons was Tosiwo Nakamura, the author of the nuclear-free clause in Balau's constitution. He said, "Being one of the smallest nations on earth, the people of Balau would like to start a movement and a legacy of peace in the Pacific region."

"We would like to send a message of solidarity to your people and ask your help to spread word of our struggle throughout your continent. We are a very small nation, and we don't want to be forced into something we don't want to be part of," another speaker from Balau said.