

On My Mind
12/10/04

In a shameful display of apathy and indifference on the part of everyone else, only two legislators showed any awareness that December 8 marked not only a religious holy day, but also the observance of Constitution Day in the CNMI. There was no message from the office of the governor, or the offices of the mayors, or from any other government leaders or officials - or anybody else - in any issue of this past week's *Saipan Tribune* or *Marianas Variety*.

Yet, second only to the Covenant, Constitution Day marks the most important of the four "C" days, since without a constitution, the CNMI could not function. Even though the Constitution experienced significant change as a result of the 2nd Constitutional Convention in 1985 (not all of them well-advised), it has, in the 20 years since, successfully withstood the test of time, remaining appropriate, accommodating and relevant to this day. That there was no formal observance in commemoration of the Constitution's signing is sad indeed.

On the other hand, it only strengthens the argument that perhaps there are too many holidays, too many "C" days (Citizenship, Commonwealth, Constitution and Covenant), to remember and to schedule appropriate ceremonies for. It is, perhaps, time to take seriously the suggestion that the four "C" days be combined into one holiday to celebrate the entire range of events that led to the establishment of the CNMI. Then everyone could focus on the one day as celebration of all four events - which would have the useful by-product of also saving the government money.

The only one of the "C" day events that occurs in a month without another holiday is, appropriately enough, Covenant Day, observed in March. It would be most fitting, therefore, to combine the four "C" holidays and celebrate them all together on Covenant Day in March. Surely, then the anniversary of the signing of the Constitution would not be overlooked.

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Another thing that should not be overlooked is the recently-released UN report "C" A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility" compiled by the UN Secretary General's appointed High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. The full text of the report, an executive summary, related press releases and additional information can be found on the UN's web site "un.org."

The panel identified six clusters of threat: war between states; violence within States, including civil wars, large-scale rights abuses and genocide; poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation; nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons; terrorism; and transnational organized crime.

The report states that terrorism threats cannot be met by military force alone. It advocates improved health care, combating poverty, supporting development as means for reducing terror threats. "Combating poverty will not only save millions of lives but also strengthen States' capacity to combat terrorism, organized crime and proliferation. Development makes everyone

" more secure, reads the executive summary in its section on policies for the prevention of such threats."

In its discussion of terrorism, the report notes that "Since 1945, an ever stronger set of norms and laws...has regulated and constrained States' decisions to use force and their conduct in war - for example, the requirement to distinguish between combatants and civilians, to use force proportionally and to live up to basic humanitarian principles."

In contrast, it says, "The norms governing the use of force by non-State actors [for example, al Qaeda] have not kept pace with those pertaining to States....virtually all forms of terrorism are prohibited by one of 12 international counter-terrorism conventions, international customary law, the Geneva Conventions or the Rome Statutes....but there is a clear difference between this scattered list of conventions and little-known provisions of other treaties and the compelling normative framework, understood by all, that should surround the question of terrorism. The United Nations must achieve the same degree of normative strength concerning non-State use of force as it has concerning State use of force....Achieving a comprehensive convention on terrorism, including a clear definition, is a political imperative."

It then defines terrorism, in part, as "any action, in addition to actions already specified by the existing conventions on aspects of terrorism, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council resolution 1566 (2004), that is intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants, when the purpose of such an act, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population, or to compel a Government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act."

Among the report's recommendations: the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission, which could "fill a crucial gap by giving the necessary attention to countries emerging from conflict." Another recommendation: establishment of a forum outside the UN, that would bring together the heads of the 20 largest economies - developed and developing - to "help the coherent management of international monetary, financial, trade and development policy."

Though some consider the UN inefficient, ineffective and weak, it is the only instrument/framework we have that provides a forum for countries of the world to work together toward international goals of peace and prosperity, and as such, it should be given due support and respect.

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Speaking of peace-building, it came as something of a surprise to learn that some travel authorities claim there is still tension between the Chinese and Japanese, and that the CNMI should take pains not to "mix and match" the two, not to put them in the same hotels. The advice was reported as being given by Pacific Asia Travel Association vice president Peter A. Semone at the recent bi-annual membership meeting of the Marianas Visitors Authority in both local papers this past week.

Assuming the statement is true, it would behoove the MVA to take a goodly portion of the

\$700,000 it has allocated towards promoting the CNMI in China, and instead bring in a Sino-Japanese relations expert for consultation on how to handle the situation. After all, Simone also told the MVA to take it one step at a time, until it had in place the “infrastructure” to accommodate the needs of Chinese tourists - and the CNMI does not yet have hotel staff or local cashiers who can speak Chinese, signs, maps and brochures in Chinese, etc. So bringing in hordes of Chinese tourists at this point could be problematic in any case.

The MVA could serve a significant and distinctive purpose - that could enhance the CNMI's attraction as a tourist destination considerably - if it could bring off the concept of “peace-building” between Chinese and Japanese as a unique characteristic of travel to the CNMI. Then it could advertise that here, the two peoples co-exist in peace and tranquility, so to speak, which should have wide appeal to any number of audiences.

But it would take an expert in Chinese-Japanese relations to define just how that should be done, and what the pitfalls are - someone who could work with both communities to make sure that no cultural norms or ideological protocols were violated - and who could develop and implement a training program for helping the CNMI's hospitality industry members carry out the idea.

Hawaii was, after all, considered a “melting pot” of various ethnic groups for years. In actuality - or at least this is what I found in living there in the early '60's - the various groups did not so much intermingle, as peacefully co-exist in a multi-cultural setting. There is no reason why the CNMI cannot offer the same.

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Another UN report worth noting is the recently released “World Economic and Social Survey 2004,” especially the second part, which discusses international migration. In its chapter on the economic impact of international migration it states, “Whatever their skills, the fact that migrants not only increase the labor force and thus aggregate supply but also demand goods and services, in turn, increases labor demand. Moreover, some immigrants use their entrepreneurial abilities to set up businesses using capital they brought with them or raised locally and, as a result, raise the demand for labour....Immigrants also enlarge the variety of goods and services at the disposal of consumers, and contribute to the smooth functioning of the labour market by supplying services that natives are no longer willing to provide at existing market prices. They thus help to expand the production frontier, to remove the constraints in economic activity and to make possible a faster rate of economic growth.”

The report notes that on a global scale, remittances sent back to their families by migrants contribute to the economy of their - usually under-developed - home country, and raise the education level of members of the recipient families.

More on this subject next week.....

