



## OFFICE OF SENATOR SABINA FLORES PEREZ

Chairperson

Committee on Environment, Revenue and Taxation, and Procurement  
*I MINA'TRENTAI SINGKO NA LIHESLATURAN GUÁHAN*  
35<sup>TH</sup> GUAM LEGISLATURE

### PRESS RELEASE

#### Senator Perez Hosts Native Plant and Cultural Connection Workshop with Native Planting

*Guam, October 25, 2019* – On Thursday, October 24, Senator Sabina Perez hosted a “Promoting Planting Natives and their Cultural Connection” workshop followed by native species planting on the grounds of Guam Congress Building. The workshop was conducted by Else N. Demeulenaere, Associate Director of the University of Guam’s Center for Island Sustainability.

The presentation, held from 12 to 1pm, was a sharing of interdisciplinary research by Ms. Demeulenaere who is also as a doctoral student at the University of Guam and University of Alaska Fairbanks. Her findings demonstrate the interdependence between culture and the environment and the importance of integrating traditional ecological knowledge in natural resource conservation.

Ms. Demeulenaere’s research focused on gathering traditional ecological knowledge about the taxa of *Serianthes* trees occurring on Guam, Rota, Yap, and Palau, and how to protect it by looking at past and current practices. The *Serianthes nelsonii* (Håyun lãgu) is the endangered tree that is currently at risk of harm by the construction of new military firing ranges on Guam. Ms. Demeulenaere emphasized that her research relies heavily on the indigenous knowledge preserved through generations of the Chamorro people, and she thanked all those who continue to practice and share this important knowledge.

“Polynesia-Micronesia region is one of only twenty-five biodiversity hotspots around the world with an exceptionally high number of endemic species, organisms within a certain biographic area that are found nowhere else in the world,” said Ms. Demeulenaere. “However, our environment is under threat by habitat loss due to the military build-up, climate change, the introduction of invasive plants and animals, and access restriction to Litekyan for traditional knowledge holders. 926 of 3,332 plant species in the Polynesia-Micronesia are listed as threatened or endangered. Of the 54 plants endemic to the Mariana Islands, Guam has 15 plants on the Endangered Species List. Additionally, Litekyan with its high concentration of native plant species, 73 native of which 13 are endemic, is an area that must be protected. To protect against these threats, an interdisciplinary approach is needed. Indigenous knowledge of native species is thus crucial for understanding and preserving our environment, particularly given the growing number of endangered and extinct species.”

“Our ancestors understood and protected our environment. They learned the characteristics and uses of our native plants, and this knowledge was preserved and passed on through generations,” said Senator Perez. “It’s imperative we incorporate their valuable teachings in our actions and our policies,” she added.



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The tree planting ceremony was later held at 5pm on grounds of the Guam Legislature. A blessing was performed Lazaro Quinata and opening remarks were made by Senator Perez, Ms. Demeulenaere, and UOG President Dr. Krise. Speaker Muña Barnes, Senator Lee, Senator Marsh (Taitano), Joe Quinata of the Guam Preservation Trust, Dr. Austin Shelton, Director for the Center for Island Sustainability (CIS), CIS support staff, and members of the public participated in planting native shrubs and trees on the grounds. Native plant species included the *Ixora triantha*, *Glochidion marianum* (Chosga), *Scaevola taccada* (Nanaso), *Bikkia tetrandia* (Gausali), and *Leucaena insularum*. Plants for the ceremony were donated by the UOG Center for Island Sustainability who will continue to maintain the plants. In addition, a number of large Royal Palms were donated by Michael and Rosita Mahony to further beautify the grounds.

“I’m proud that our Legislature is leading by example. I thank my colleagues for prioritizing the planting of native plants on our grounds, and for their continued support in promoting the preservation of indigenous knowledge,” said Senator Perez. “I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to all those who help to organize and take part in this event and to recreate our cultural connections to native plants.”

“When we use indigenous or endemic plants in our gardens and other green spaces, we help our native animals to thrive,” said Senator Régine Biscoe Lee. “I’m thankful to Senator Perez and Ms. Demeulenaere for promoting the educational and cultural benefits our island gains by going back to our roots, so to speak. I would also like to extend a special appreciation to the University of Guam, the Dept. of Agriculture, and to my parents, whose generosity helped make today’s event possible,” she continued.

The workshop was broadcast on the Guam Legislature’s television channel and is available to stream on YouTube at [tinyurl.com/GuamNativePlants](https://tinyurl.com/GuamNativePlants).

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