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Chairperson

Committee on Environment, Revenue and Taxation, Labor, Procurement,
and Statistics, Research, and Planning

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Senator Perez Commends Prutehi Litekyan and Earthjustice for Efforts Towards Protecting Our People and Environment

Hagåtña, Guam – Today, in a hearing at the District Court of Guam, local community group Prutehi Litekyan/Save Ritidian, along with Earthjustice, hit a roadblock in their fight to end the 40-year military practice of the open burning and detonation of harmful munitions and other hazardous waste on Guam following Chief Judge Frances Tydingco-Gatewood's decision in favor of the U.S. Air Force, deferring the matter to the Guam Environmental Protection Agency (Guam EPA).

At today's hearing, PLSR and Earthjustice argued that although Guam EPA has the ability to deny the OB/OD permit sought by the Air Force, the fact that the Air Force filed to renew their permit, constitutes incompliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires the U.S. Air Force to assess the environmental effects of their actions prior to seeking renewal of their OB/OD permit.

"Both the U.S. Air Force's intention to renew their OB/OD permit and the District Court's decision to dismiss the lawsuit were rendered despite recent trends across the country that have deemed OB/OD a very harmful practice," Senator Perez said. "For instance, the PACT Act, recently signed into law by President Biden, points to the need to end the outdated practice of open burn/open detonation, which is based on 'dirty technology.' There are much safer alternatives implemented in several communities in the US that comply with USEPA environmental standards and DOD's rigorous safety review."

Long- and short-term exposures to the harmful emissions from OB/OD are known to lead to heart attacks, asthma attacks, and premature death. The open burn/open detonation pit on Guam is sited in the north near our sole source aquifer that supplies over 80% of our island's population with drinking water. It is also adjacent to the island's two most populated villages of Yigo and Dededo.

"I am grateful to Prutehi Litekyan/Save Ritidian, Earthjustice, and the many community groups that are protectors of our people and environment," Senator Perez stated. "When we heal the land, we heal the people. In turn, when we heal the people, we heal the land."

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