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Essay Prompt: What can the CNMI do to strike a sustainable balance between land preservation and development?

In order to develop land and carry the needs of a growing economy in the CNMI, it is crucial to have an effective development strategy that is also differential to the cultural value of the land. For the people of the CNMI, I included, land represents history, culture, life, and bloodline. Land preservation is undoubtedly important for the past, present, and future generations. On the other hand, our island strives to keep up with a constantly growing society. This requires newer buildings for more businesses and housing plans for the rising population. Because of this, land development becomes an equally important issue for the commonwealth. Both land preservation and development define what the CNMI is today. For the CNMI to create a sustainable balance between land preservation and development, we must confidently regard and understand the cultural value of the land and its people and the importance of growth in the economy.

The indigenous people of the CNMI have fought since history to preserve the beautiful, untouched pieces of land that is the home of our ecosystem and proof of our past. Protecting our land that connects us with our culture and history is the never-ending duty of our people. When discussing land preservation, it is pivotal to listen to the voices of the community directly. The 2021 senate public hearing discussing a proposal to amend Article XII of the constitution, which limits the ownership of CNMI land only to persons of Northern Mariana Islands descent, highlights the need to consider the opinion of the citizens first. During the hearing, groups of NMD spoke up in emotional agreement or disagreement of the

proposal. One of who was Dr. Isa Arriola, who tearfully stated “When the economy crashes and all else fails, all that we have is land. It’s the only constant and the only guarantee. We know that. It’s not just a piece of property; it’s who we are. Let us not be deceived into thinking that this is anything else but giving up who we are” (Limol). Although there were equals in pros and cons, one agreed idea was this: the land of the CNMI is important to the people, and thorough discussions are key to satisfy the people and the needs of economy.

When we build upon land, it changes forever. It is important for the current leaders and forward to fully understand this when making decisions on land development for manufacturing industries, socioeconomics, and tourism. All three topics are the fundamentals of a growing society and population. The steady rise of population in the CNMI (about 54,000 in 2010 to 58,000 currently) further demands more housing, more jobs, and more industry. The CNMI’s tie with the historic land is the most prevalent obstacle when trying to create the “more”. How do we continue developing land in consideration of this? Developers keep in mind the significance of the land being built on, and ensure that projects are done in an ethical manner: appropriate building location, area size, project schedule, supplies, etc. They further ensure that big projects (that effectively change the integrity of the land) require the vote of government, like the issue of the Imperial Pacific Saipan Casino. Such efforts allow us to build on our society, while still making land preservation a key point in decision making. Furthermore, it allows us to open more opportunities for economic growth in the islands.

A sustainable balance between land development and land preservation in the CNMI comes with the effort of many people and deciding on many things. Both are equally

important to the integrity of the CNMI. Land preservation is crucial to the history, culture, and rightful inheritance of the people of the commonwealth. Land development is critical to further advance our society. After considering the land, both cultural values and need for economic growth, the CNMI can successfully strike a balance between land preservation and development.

Works Cited

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