

Benito Valdez

Testimony of Benito Valdez

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U.S. Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

HONORABLE LEGISLATORS, THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK BEFORE YOU TODAY.

MY NAME IS BENITO VALDEZ. I AM 83 YEARS OLD AND I AM A WORLD WAR II VETERAN. IN MY UNIT FROM THE PHILIPPINES, I AM ONE OF ONLY THREE SURVIVING MEMBERS. TWO OF US LIVE IN WASHINGTON STATE.

I COME BEFORE YOU TODAY TO SEEK HELP AND UNDERSTANDING. LET ME BEGIN BY THANKING YOU FOR ALLOWING ME THIS RARE OPPORTUNITY TO BE PART OF THE VOICE FOR MORE 200,000 FORGOTTEN FILIPINO WARRIORS OF FREEDOM.

I AM AN OLD SOLDIER WHO FOUGHT A WAR THAT WAS NOT OURS, A WAR THAT DEVASTATED MY HOMELAND, AND KILLED COUNTLESS YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN OF MY GENERATION. THAT WAR LEFT A DEEP AND BITTER WOUND THAT UP TO THIS DAY HAS NOT HEALED. IF I EXPRESS FRUSTRATION AS I TESTIFY BEFORE YOU, IT MERELY ECHOES THE BETRAYAL OF A SOLDIER WHO HAS SERVED WELL BUT HAS SUFFERED FOR MORE THAN SIXTY YEARS.

WHEN MY UNIT OF 100 FILIPINO SOLDIERS AND GUERILLAS HELPED AMERICAN COMMANDOS TO FREE 600 AMERICAN AND CANADIAN PRISONERS OF WAR IN THAT DARING RAID OF THE GARRISON IN CABANATUAN, WE SERVED WITH HONOR AND LOYALTY. TODAY---63 YEARS LATER---THAT LOYALTY AND SENSE OF

DUTY HAS NOT FADED AWAY. MANY OF US AGING FILIPINO WAR VETERANS BELIEVE THAT IT IS OUR AMERICAN ALLIES WHO HAVE INSTEAD FORGOTTEN US.

THERE ARE LESS THAN 100 OF US LIVING IN WASHINGTON STATE. WITH THE ESTIMATED 7,000 FILIPINO WORLD WAR II VETERANS LIVING IN AMERICA AND THE 13,000 STILL IN THE PHILIPPINES, WE ARE A FAST-FADING, MARGINALIZED POPULATION. OUR CRY FOR JUSTICE HAS GOTTEN THIS FAR AND WE THANK MANY ADVOCATES AND SUPPORTERS WHO CONTINUE TO STAND WITH US. A WIDOWER, I LIVE ALONE IN A SMALL PLACE NEAR A CHAPEL. MY DAUGHTER, A DOCTOR WHO CANNOT PRACTICE IN AMERICA, IS HERE ON A TEMPORARY VISA AS A CHURCH WORKER AND TO TAKE CARE OF ME. I HAVE PETITIONED FOR MY CHILDREN AND I HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR 14 YEARS. MEANWHILE, A

HEART BY-PASS HAS PROLONGED MY LIFE. I LIVE ON SOCIAL SECURITY INCOME AND PRAY THAT MY LIFE IS EXTENDED SOME MORE. EACH YEAR I FEEL WEAKER.

PLEASE, HONORABLE LEGISLATORS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA...PAUSE FOR A MINUTE AND THINK HOW DIFICULT IT HAS BEEN FOR US OLD FORGOTTEN SOLDIERS AND OUR FAMILIES. MANY OF THE ORIGINAL 200,000 CONSCRIPTED COMRADES OF MINE HAVE PASSED AWAY ANGRY, DISAPPOINTED, DEFEATED. I AM ONE OF THE LAST 20,000 STILL AROUND TO CARRY ON THE FINAL BATTLE. YES...WE ARE ANGRY BUT WE ARE TOO WEAK NOW TO ARGUE OR RAISE OUR VOICE.

ONE FINAL APPEAL WE MAKE IN OUR TWILIGHT YEARS IS TO GIVE US WHAT WE HAVE RIGHTFULLY EARNED. WE ARE NOT BEGGING. WE NEED YOUR HELP AND UNDERSTANDING SO THAT YOU WILL NOW PASS LAWS THAT WILL GIVE US FULL VETERANS BENEFITS. THAT MEANS THAT YOU WILL ALLOW US TO REGAIN OUR DIGNITY AND TO LIVE THE FEW REMAINING YEARS OF OUR LIVES IN THE COMPANY OF OUR

SONS AND DAUGHTERS IN THIS BENEVOLENT LAND OF
AMERICA.

I SALUTE ALL OF YOU AND THANK YOU ON BEHALF OF ALL
MY FELLOW VETERANS. GOD BLESS US ALL.