



**SENATOR FRANK F. BLAS, JR.**

*I' MINA' TRENTA NA LIHESLATURAN GUÅHAN*

November 30, 2009

Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman,  
House Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, D.C. 20515-6035

Re: Testimony on Assessing the Guam War Claims Process

Dear Chairman Skelton:

Enclosed for your review is a copy of my position statement assessing the Guam War Claims process.

Sincerely,

**FRANK F. BLAS, JR.**

Enclosure:



**SENATOR FRANK F. BLAS, JR.**

*P' MINA' TRENTA NA LIHESLATURAN GUÅHAN*

Chairman Skelton, members of this esteemed Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in this hearing on assessing the Guam War Claims process.

My name is Frank Flores Blas, Jr., a Senator with the 30<sup>th</sup> Guam Legislature and son to Frank Flores Blas and Lydia Ada Calvo; grandson to Vicente Cepeda and Beatrice Flores Blas and Jose Leon Guerrero and Hermina Ada Calvo; and son-in-law to Regina Manibusan Reyes. I mention my relations because they were survivors of the horrors and atrocities of the Japanese occupation of Guam during World War II. I mention them, because for them, along with the thousands of Chamorros who suffered as well, or died during the occupation, I come before you to ask for closure to their sixty-five year old struggle for recognition of their loyalty to the United States in the face of a brutal enemy force.

While preparing this testimony, I thought it best to speak to survivors to get their advice on what to say. When I told them that *the hearing was on assessing the war claims process*, all of them started with a two-word question, “What process?”

Many had informed me that immediately after the war, they had heard that the United States government wanted details of how they were treated and of the savagery they witnessed. Some were told that because of what happened to them, they would be compensated, but more importantly, that their struggles would not be forgotten.

Still, there were others who did not know at the time that their nation's government wanted to know of their sufferings because either the word never got to them or they were busy trying to rebuild their lives. Nevertheless, every survivor that I spoke to expressed that despite what they were told, or what they heard being told, nothing ever happened.

In December of 2003, almost six years to this date, a few of the survivors who were still alive at that time, gave testimony to the Guam War Claims Commission. Survivors like my mother-in-law, Regina Manibusan Reyes, Mr. Edward Leon Guerrero Aguon, Mr. Jose Afaisen Pinaula, Mr. Juan Martinez Unpingco, and Mrs. Rosa Roberto Carter gave their personal accounts of the beatings and humiliations they endured, the slavery they were subjected to, and the beheadings they were forced to witness.

They told of the nightmares that they still have, about how their childhood was taken away, and about how they did not know how to play with their grandchildren today because they were stripped of the opportunity to grasp that concept in order to survive.

Today Mr. Chairman, if you were to ask these same people to come before this Committee to provide their testimony again, many of them will not be able to make it, because they have since passed on.

One such survivor is Mr. Edward Leon Guerrero Aguon.

In 2003 he ended his testimony by saying, "I am 77 years old. If you ask me again in another ten years, I may not be here to testify." Mr. Aguon passed away on September 28, 2007.

Mr. Chairman, as I had been told to ask at this hearing, what war claims process does Congress want to assess?

My people have told their stories time and time again. Our delegates to Congress, starting with the late Antonio B. Won Pat, then retired Brigadier General Ben G. Blaz, Dr. Robert A. Underwood, and now the Honorable Madeleine Z. Bordallo have all made Guam's war claims a priority during their tenures. For sixty-five years my people have been waiting. When will it end?

There is a demoralizing sentiment that is growing amongst the survivors. This sentiment is that the United States government is waiting for all of the war survivors to pass on so that this issue will not have to be dealt with. Although my upbringing has taught me to apologize for this statement, I chose not to and challenge our nation's leaders to prove that opinion wrong.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for keeping your commitment to hold this hearing in order to move this issue along. I can tell you with confidence that if given the opportunity, the physical stamina, and the financial resources to do so, many of the survivors will come before this Committee, or any other panel, one more time, in the hopes that this time, they will have closure to their struggle.

But because many of the people whom I speak of could not be present today, or will not be able to make the long trip it takes to get from Guam to here, I humbly and very respectfully request that you have continued hearings on Guam or require that any future process for the war claims be held on Guam as well.

Attached to my testimony today are newspaper articles of the individual accounts of four of Guam's war survivors. As you read through their stories, I also ask that you look at their faces. It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words. I will tell you that at the time their photos were taken, they were not asked to pose or provide a specific expression. They were only told to be comfortable.

Comfortable, Mr. Chairman as I am providing this testimony to you, forces beyond the control of my island's people are mobilizing the largest and most expensive peace-time military buildup on Guam. I can confidently say that if you ask any Guam resident if they knew the two countries who partnered in this activity, they will all say the United States and Japan.

This leads to an uncomfortable conversation that will ensue if you ask that question to a survivor of the war.

When word of the inclusion of Guam's war claims bill into the Defense Authorization Act was received on Guam, many of our survivors were cautiously optimistic. Their unenthusiastic reaction bewildered me at first. I was perplexed as to why there was no excitement with the prospect that their sixty-five year wait will end.

Even the efforts to drum up support through petition drives and letter writing campaigns received lackluster responses.

Then one tired and dejected war survivor told me something that made sense of the reactions I was observing. He told me, "The United States and Japan don't give a damn about the Chamorro people. Putting the war claims into the bill that will help the military build their bases on Guam, to help Japan out, just puts *donne'* (pepper) into the wound. With war claims, I'll believe it when I see it."

When news that the war claims provision was stricken from the final version of the bill, obviously, there was disappointment. Unfortunately, there was also the recurred feeling of dejection and the emergence of a sentiment uncommon amongst survivors, resentment.

As one survivor has directed me to ask, "You want me to be comfortable with the building of military bases on my island with Japan, when you haven't even recognized what Japan did to us during the war?"

This survivor further requested that I say, "Enough talk and enough planning. Deal with our war claims before you start to build your bases."

Comfort, this word best describes what I am asking for the people of Guam. Give my *man'amko*, the elderly people of my island, the peace and comfort they so rightfully deserve before they become just a memory of a Chamorro people who suffered and died, yet remained loyal and patriotic.

Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman, House Committee on Armed Services  
Assessing the Guam War Claims Process  
December 2, 2009  
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Give my *man'amko* the comfort of knowing that even after all these years, their suffering has not gone unnoticed.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak for those who cannot be here and for those who can never speak again.

-end-

# **REAL PEOPLE.**

# **REAL STORIES.**

Testimonies of war survivors  
presented to the  
War Claims Review Commission in 2003.

- **Keeping the stories alive.**
- **Keeping the war reparations discussion fresh.**
- **Keeping the Federal government on notice to resolve the issue in 2010.**



# War survivors' quest for justice continues

Tuesday, 17 November 2009 01:46 by Therese Hart | Variety News Staff

GUAM'S quest for recognition of the pain and suffering endured by Japanese Imperial Forces during their occupation in World War II recently suffered a setback by the United States Congress in their crafting of the 2010 Defense Authorization Act.

Although the Guam World War II Loyalty Recognition Act did not survive the attempt to have it included as an amendment to the Defense bill, U.S. Senate leaders promised Guam's representative to have hearings on the war claims bill and consider taking action on the measure before the end of 2009-2010 term.

These hearings are expected to begin in December. Since many of our manamko who suffered the atrocities of war have since passed away or are infirmed, there are ongoing discussions to have them appear before the committee via teleconference in the District Court of Guam's courtroom.

In December 2003, survivors of the war told their stories to the Federal War Claims Commission during a series of hearings held on Guam. They gave their accounts of the brutality, the anguish, the degradation, the sufferings, and the fears that they had to endure.

They gave eye witness testimonies of the lashings, the beatings, and the beheadings of their loved ones and friends. In those hearings, those who testified also expressed their hope that their nation will finally acknowledge what they went through and

give them the recognition they so rightfully deserve.

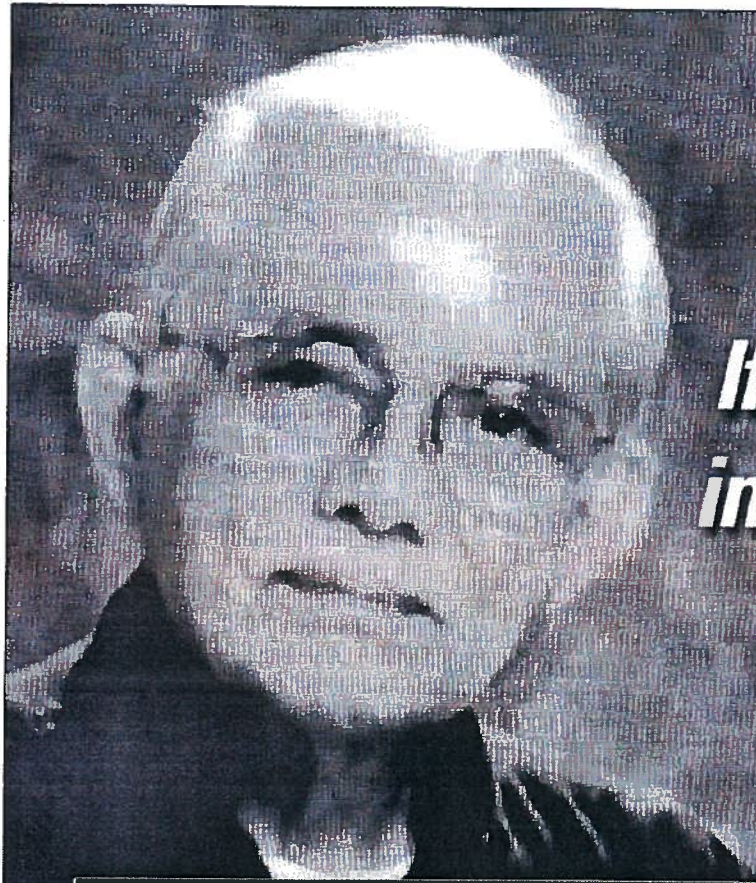
Although there has been the promise of the opportunity to address the war claims issue over the next year, many of the remaining survivors are well within their golden years and traveling to Washington, DC to testify once again may be too difficult.

Because of this, the decision makers in Congress have been asked to seriously consider holding any hearings on this matter on Guam, and because of the midterm elections that will be occurring across the United States late next year, it was further requested that the hearings be conducted before March 2010.

Unfortunately, there are also those who testified in 2003 who have since passed away. It is for those individuals who have died while waiting for their recognition and for our elderly who will find it impossible to travel almost 9,000 miles away that Sen. Frank Blas Jr.'s office will present a weekly series entitled, "Real People, Real Stories."

Once every week, the testimonies of those individuals who appeared before the War Claims Commission in 2003. Although transcripts of the hearings are open to the public, we will get the permission of the survivors, or that of their heirs, to provide their testimonies in this series. If the survivors or their heirs wish, we will also include their sentiments of the waiting they continue to endure.

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***I am 77 years old.  
If you ask me again  
in another 10 years,  
I may not be here  
to testify.***

**EDWARD L.G. AGUON PASSED AWAY ON SEPTEMBER 28, 2007**

My name is Edward L.G. Aguon. I am a sole survivor. I was 15 years old when Guam was invaded. Today, I am asked to remember a painful time in my life, a time that I have been trying to forget, twice before have been asked to remember the same painful memories. I hope that today will be the last. In the questionnaire, number six, A and B, and number seven, I wrote about my injuries, forced labor, and the infamous march to Manenggon. I am confident that this honorable Commission will read it with compassion and empathy. I would like to spend the next few minutes to express the deep pain and sorrow that were carved in my mind and in the minds of our people, I'm pretty sure, because of the cruel occupation we were forced to endure.

But how can anyone express all these feelings, Mr. Chairman? An experience of leading to a brutal, atrocious occupation by the enemy force in five minutes.

The most agonizing memories come to mind when I think of the occupation of being forced to watch people brutalized, tortured and killed, to see the look on their face when the final stab of the bayonet pierced their flesh, to hear the cries as their last breath leave their bodies. And even then, the attackers continued to thrust the bayonet into their lifeless bodies.

I recall, as well, the most heartbreaking incident in my life, when we were hustled from our ranch and ordered to march to Manenggon. Tens of miles in hot and rainy days, we were gathered like cattle being led to the slaughter. We could not help anyone who fell behind or fell down. Even if that person was your grandmother, a sick relative or a dying friend, you had to move on and leave them there, lying on the road covered with mud.

I didn't know what lay ahead, Mr. Chairman. Whether we were going to live or be slaughtered. And what of those who were injured or killed? My cousin, Marikita Perez Howard was killed. God knows how she died. My uncle, Phillipe Aguon Unpingco was brutally tortured and died, as well. Moreover, what about those members in my labor group who were critically injured? Jose Ignacio Flores from the Bisentiko Family, Jesus Cruz from the Papa Family, and a man called Ibong who died from his internal injuries? What about those who lived through the war, Mr. Chairman, but have since passed away, like my friend, Juan Cabrera, who miraculously survived near beheading?

Their stories will never be told, and their testimony will never be heard.

I am 77 years old. If you ask me again in another 10 years, I may not be able to be here to testify.



***He pushed me  
and did what  
he wanted.***

**Regina Reyes,  
95 Years Old, Survivor**

I am Regina Reyes. My husband is Henry Reyes. I live in Agana Heights. In 1941, when we heard that the Japanese is in Hawaii, we're to get away in the house. We stay there all day until four o'clock. I go to my other house. Since I just got in my house, they got in with gun and shiny bayonet.

He asked me -- I don't know what to say about this, pointed the gun, and I said, no, I don't have.

And then he just pushed me on the wall and do what he want. He raped me.

Afterwards he left, then I went to my in-laws and they questioned me what happened so I said to wait first until I took a shower. The next day, my husband went to Mr. Tomas Ooka who was the commissioner at the time and he told him what happen to me.

Mr. Ooka said that they couldn't do anything because they did not know his name. They made my husband work from Tai to Agana Heights then we stayed in Famha. My husband kept working but I was left in Famha deep in the jungle.

When the Japanese came, my husband was working in Tai. When we moved to Manenggon, my husband accompanied me then he left again because he was tasked to do some carrying of things for the Japanese.

Then, that night, when the Americans came, a Saipanese Chamorro came to tell me that my husband told him to tell me that he was alright. Since the time my husband and I parted company in Manenggon, that was the last time I ever saw him.



# ***I suffered burns to both of my hands.***

**Jose Afaisen Pinaula**  
*79 years old, Survivor*

My name is Jose Afaisen Pinaula. I'm from Malojloj, Inarajan. I was 11 years old at the time. A little bit more than 11 years. I was born in August 13, 1930.

The physical trauma I received, and others alike here on Guam, shares the same feeling which our rights and our freedom was taken away.

We were treated and traumatized by the frequent formation and meeting reminding us that if we did not obey the Japanese Imperial order, we would be punished or killed by the firing squad. In addition, they frequently search our bodies and homes for weapons and other U.S. made goods or items.

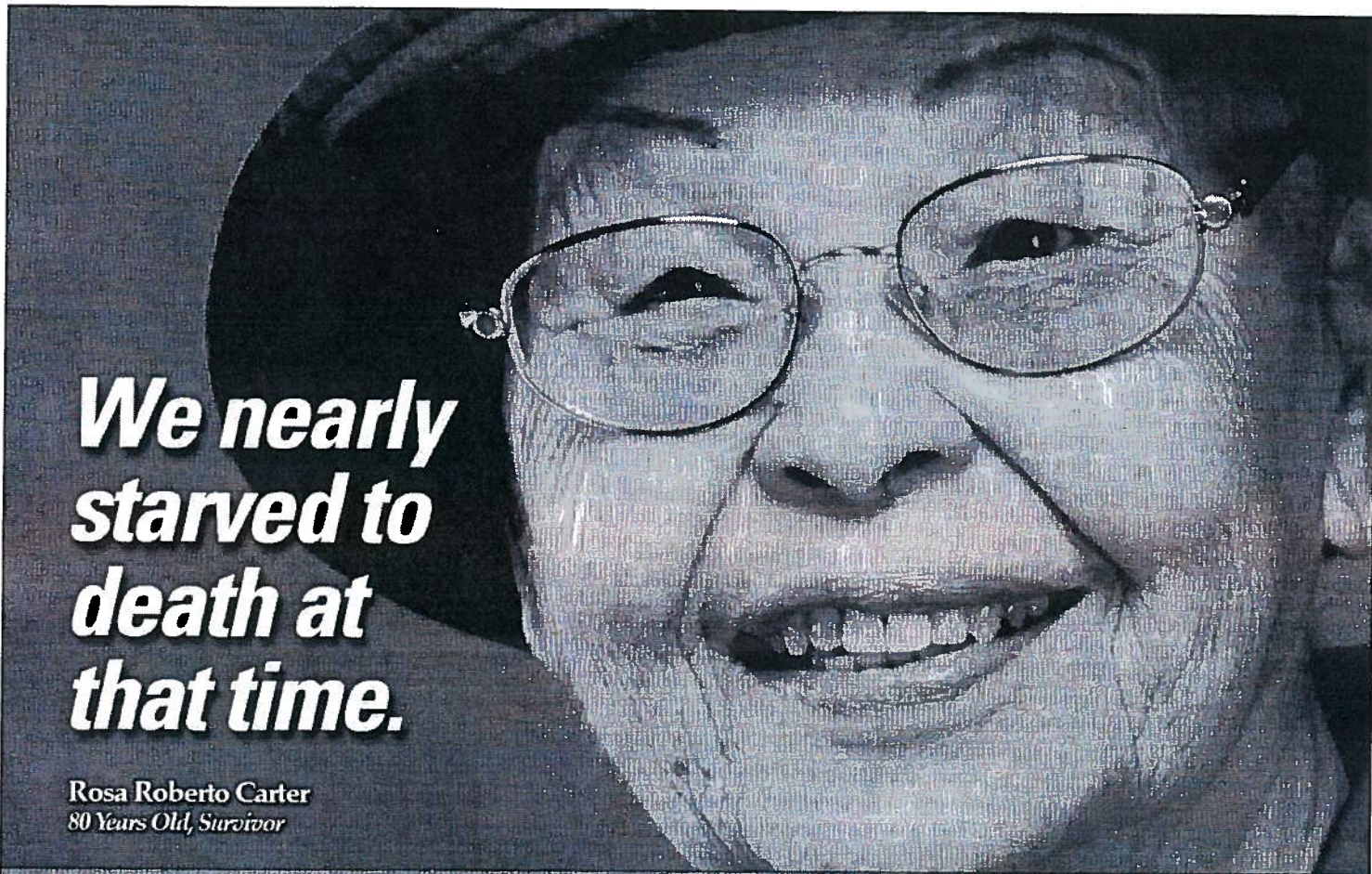
At one time, Japanese soldier had slapped me six times, more time because he had claim that an order he received from the Japanese officer in charge was to

inform the people working at the coral pit to stop and prepare to return to the camp before daybreak.

I have suffered painful burn to both of my hands that lasted at least three days, then I was assigned to keep the diesel oil torchlight burning all night.

I became nervous wreck. My morale was at its lowest breaking point. I was frightened and scared for my life, that I did anything the Japanese soldier just to survive and be alive. Forced to work, even if I was extremely ill, there was absolutely no excuse not to work, unless you on the verge of dying.

I reach a breaking point in my life when I did not care what happened to me. If I had a weapon, I would kill the Japanese guard and hope that I would be able to run away and hide afterward.



# *We nearly starved to death at that time.*

**Rosa Roberto Carter**  
*80 Years Old, Survivor*

When Japan occupied Guam 62 years ago, I was 12 years old, the oldest child in our family. My mother would have another child during the occupation, and her last one after the war, for a total of nine of us who made it through childhood. In regard to physical damage from the war, I am sure the effects of malnutrition on my parents, as well as nine of us kids, was severe in both the near term and over the following years.

There's no way to know all the negative effects of the two years of malnutrition we were forced to experience during the occupiers who confiscated our food for themselves. In the last two weeks, they forced us into more difficult situations involving a forced march and virtual imprisonment in a squalid camp, where there was no food at all. We older kids foraged for our family, searching wild lands for many miles. We nearly starved to death at that time.

In regard to immediately visible physical damage, most of us suffered wounds from being forced into the jungle, where we contacted scarring napalm from the United States bombing of the Japanese. When the bombing stopped, we were forced to go back to clearing bushes,

which were dripping with this napalm. And in a proper setting, I could show you some scars, which have irritated me for 60 years. One of my brothers lost parts of two fingers, as well, from the live ammunition scattered over so much of Guam after the fighting in 1944.

And at one time, I found myself clinging to a large breadfruit tree while American planes attacked. Human limbs, arms and legs, flew through the air on their own. People screamed in the grip of hysteria. I saw people going berserk.

My own forced labor consisted, at first, of clearing fields in the Mangilao area. My brother Juan was also forced to do this too. At this time I was singled out by the Japanese soldiers, locked up in a tiny room at the old Price Elementary school house, and interrogated about my loyalty to the United States. It may have had something to do with my slightly lighter skin color, but the terrifying experience is still vivid in my mind. Also, at this time, I was given the extra duty of carrying their lunches to Japanese soldiers located at the present site of the Father Duenas Memorial School.

Our forced march started for me late one afternoon, when my brother and I

returned from working in the fields to find my parents and my siblings loading our bull cart with as much food and personal belongings as possible. People congregated at the Mangilao school areas, where the trek to Manenggon concentration camp started around twilight. We trudged along on foot all night. Weak people fell by the way side. I do not know what happened to them.

In regard to the constant terror of being an occupied people, earlier in Mangilao, many of us were forced to line up in orderly rows to witness the beating of a family for the crime of trying to hide some of its food from the Japanese occupiers. If we showed any emotion, we would have been beaten too. We practiced a code of silence because that means collaborators might be anywhere at any time.

Near the end of the war out here in Guam, because tomorrow men were being forced to the front lines where they were to be sacrificed as human targets, my father went into hiding. As a survivor, immediately he led his entire family back to Mangilao. The regimentation of our lives extended to digging our own graves in the last days at Manenggon.

**“The Review Commission affirms that there is a moral obligation on the part of our national government to pay compensation for war damages ...**

**... in order to ensure to the extent possible that no single individual or group of individuals bears more than a just part of the overall burden of war.”**

Guam War Claims review Commission  
Final Report  
June 9, 2004.

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ERIN C. CONATON, STAFF DIRECTOR

November 23, 2009

The Honorable Frank Blas Jr.  
Senator  
30th Guam Legislature  
I Mina' Trenta Na Liheslaturan Guahan  
238 Archbishop Flores Street, Suite 908  
Hagatna, Guam 96910-5113

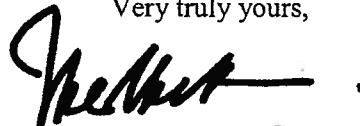
Dear Senator Blas:

You are invited to testify before the House Armed Services Committee on Assessing the Guam War Claims Process on Wednesday, December 2, 2009, at 1:00 PM in room 210 of the House Visitor Center.

Committee Rule 13 provides that witness statements must be delivered to the committee at least 48 hours in advance of the hearing to facilitate distribution to the members. Therefore, we request that 120 copies of your prepared statement be delivered to room 2120 Rayburn House Office Building by the morning of Monday, November 30, 2009. In addition, consistent with the House rules requirement to make materials from hearings electronically available to the general public, Committee Rule 13 requires that witness statements be provided to the committee in electronic form. This request may be satisfied by a transmittal via e-mail to Caterina Dutto at [caterina.dutto@mail.house.gov](mailto:caterina.dutto@mail.house.gov).

I appreciate your willingness to appear before the committee and look forward to your testimony. Should you have any questions, please contact Julie Unmacht on the committee staff at (202) 225-4252 or at [julie.unmacht@mail.house.gov](mailto:julie.unmacht@mail.house.gov).

Very truly yours,



IKE SKELTON  
Chairman

IS:cd