

1st

"Invasive Species are Everybody's Responsibility"

Invasive Species Day Essay Competition  
February 25, 2015

Submitted by: Kiana Kerbil Kloulchad

9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Palau High School

488-6389

Have you ever driven along the compact road up to Babeldaob? In most parts along the compact road, you'll see a popular type of plant known as the famous "kebeas" or mikania plant. It is everywhere and practically covers and hides the other beautiful plants that make up the vegetation of Babeldaob. Now, if I were a tourist going to Babeldaob for a tour, I would think that the mikania plant was part of the tourist attraction. I would probably also think that it was a very important plant since it is everywhere and so I make it the background of my pictures or other pictures that I will be taking. Invasive weeds and possibly other species of animals have become considered "invasive" to our country of Palau. Therefore, many efforts have been taken to eradicate such invasive species yet, we are still facing the same problems. Why? Well, probably because we need everyone to come together and work together to rid our country of invasive species.

It takes more than just Palau's Agricultural workforce to eradicate such invasive species that have taken over much of our vegetation. When I say, taken over, I mean that they have covered most of our plants and various trees in our forests that we cannot even see the beauty of these plants and trees. It is safe to say that the invasive species are like drugs but instead of taking over people, they have taken over our forests, hills, and even some people's backyards. So we can't just sit back and say, "Never mind, it's not my job so it doesn't bother me," or "It doesn't affect me and my family so I don't have to participate in eradicating invasive weeds." That kind of attitude will just enable the invasive species to take over our gardens, farms, taro patches, forests, and maybe even our backyards. It is our country and we all have a responsibility to take care of it like it has taken care of us. Just like at the Ebiil summer camps in Ollei where I learned this motto, "My land, my water, my home. May I be as good to you as you have been to me." It is a great message that shouldn't just apply to Ebiil campers; it should also apply to all citizens of Belau who call Belau their home.

As a young Palauan citizen, I look up to older wiser people. Most of them are my family members and they are very much concerned when it comes to nature. They are also involved in a lot of programs or jobs that have to do with protecting Palau's natural heritage. I wish that every Palauan citizen, whether young or old, could have the same attitude about Palau's natural environment as my family and I do. If we all cared more about our natural environment, than we could all pitch in to save it and not have a "there's someone getting paid to do it so why should I" attitude. It is our Belau and so you should because it is our responsibility as a nation.

If only everyone knew how hard our moms, aunts, and grandmas worked to fix their gardens or taro patches and then the invasive species just grew all over the place; destroying the plants and all the hard work just went to waste. Yes, perhaps you'll say that nowadays the Bangladesh guy is the one fixing the farm, garden, or taro patch, but they are getting paid to do that because our mothers are busy working to support us in school. Our moms want us to get educated and still eat taro and tapioca too. They have an even harder job of preserving our local sources of food and putting us through school to get our education. There are so many people out

there who are not well educated about invasive species and therefore, they do not care and do not bother to do anything about it.

So, if not all of us will take care of our country, who will? We all have to help each other out and keep our country free of invasive weeds and other invasive species. People from the Agriculture office have to do more outreach programs to schools and communities to educate people about invasive species in Palau. By doing so, Palauans will be more informed and will understand the importance of working together to fight the invasive species. Communities or villages can then get together and plan on how to eradicate invasive weeds and animals. Furthermore, adults will have a chance to show their children the importance of eradicating invasive species so that their kids will see it as something they have to do for their community as well as their country.

I remember when I was little, my mom used to participate in these activities of eradicating invasive weeds in Palau with the Palau Community College Tourism Club. She and the club members would go out and pull or cut weeds at different locations. When she came back she would bring a T-shirt for my grandpa. Nowadays, I don't see or hear of any of these activities being done. Maybe there is little support or concern regarding invasive species in Palau. Agriculture covers a huge part of our lives, not just food. There's a whole lot more to it and people just need to get knowledgeable about it. That is why everyone should get involved and do their part in getting rid of invasive species.

As our country is well known for being a tourist destination, we should take care of it so that when tourists do come, they'll see what we are doing for our country and won't destroy its natural beauty. So as the tourists go up Babeldaob, they'll be able to see more than just the mikania plant. They'll be able to see banana trees, mahogany trees, lines of tapioca gardens, taro patches with many taro plants, and other beautiful flora that cover the island of Babeldaob. Thus, they will see how much we care for our land, people, and our natural environment that we keep it clean and beautiful. After all, you know what they say, "Monkey see, monkey do!" Let's all take part in pulling out the weeds!