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Future Political Status Commission

Congress of Micronesia

STATEMENT OF INTENT

Twenty-two years ago, when the islands of Micronesia were constituted as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and placed under American administration, the United Nations directed that the administering authority "promote the development of the inhabitants of the Trust Territory toward self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Trust Territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned." At that time, when the traumatic damage and dislocation of war had barely passed, when the distance between the Territory's six districts seemed so great as to call into question the area's very existence as a single administrative unit, when American plans in the Trust Territory were as vague as Micronesians' future intentions, there was little urgency about what has come to be known as the "future political status" of the Trust Territory. Yet with the passage of time, with the formation in 1961 of the Council of Micronesia, in 1964 of the Congress of Micronesia, and in 1967 of the Congress' Political Status Commission, we have reached our years of decision.

The Political Status Commission was created to study the alternatives before Micronesia and to make its recommendations to the Congress and to the people of Micronesia. We have not taken this task lightly nor have we accomplished our work quickly. Two years of study have gone into the recommendations we now make. We have consulted amongst ourselves. We have consulted scholars and administrators. We have weighed the interests of America and of our own people. Members of the Commission have travelled to the Virgin Islands, a territory of the United States, to Puerto Rico, a commonwealth of the United States, as well as to Washington.

Most recently, in order to learn what these islands could reasonably expect or hope for in the future, the whole Commission visited island groups throughout the Pacific. We saw American Samoa, a territory of the United States, and Western Samoa, a former territory which has chosen independence. In Fiji we visited a crown colony of Britain. In Papua-New Guinea we toured the only other surviving Trust Territory in the world. Also, in our travels, we talked with leaders of Nauru, an independent island-nation, and the Cook Islands, a state in free association with New Zealand. We believe that we have acquainted ourselves with every alternative we might possibly face; that we have studied and contemplated every reasonable political arrangement for Micronesia. After all our study and travel, after candid discussion with each other and deep personal thought, after having considered as many as a dozen political possibilities, we have reduced the desirable alternatives to two, and from among these two, we have chosen one.

To the Congress of Micronesia, to the district legislatures and municipal governments of Micronesia, to the Trust Territory administration and the Government of the United States, the Political Status Commission makes the following recommendation: that the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands be constituted as a self-governing state and that this Micronesian state--internally self-governing and with Micronesian control of all its branches, including the executive--negotiate entry into free association with the United States.

In recommending that the Trust Territory become a free associated state, the Political Status Commission recognizes two inescapable realities: the need for Micronesian self-government and the fact of long-standing American interest in this area.

We choose a free state because the continuation of a quasi-colonial status would prove degrading to Micronesia and unworthy of America. Difficulties and problems will surely arise, but the administering authority in these islands must become an authority administered by Micronesians. At the same time, we choose an associated state because we recognize the historically unique partnership between Micronesia and the United States. In recommending free association with the United States, we seek not an end but a re-definition, renewal and improvement of this partnership.

Whatever our particular evaluations of the American administration in Micronesia may be, we feel that one contribution has been indelible, one achievement almost unqualified: the idea of democratic, representative, constitutional government. Our recommendation of a free associated state is indissolubly linked to our desire for such a democratic, representative, constitutional government. We endorse this system--which was brought to us by America and which we have come to know as an essentially American system.

Yet our partnership with the United States and our endorsement of the American democratic system must be joined by our wish to live as Micronesians, to maintain our Micronesian identity, to create a Micronesian state. Such a state, we believe, would be a credit to America and to ourselves. As a self-governing state in free association with the United States, our past twenty years of partnership would be raised to a new level in a compact, not between guardian and ward, but between more nearly equal friends.

Now we must ask, as others will ask, what can a self-governing Micronesian state hope for from its free association with the United States? And what can the United States expect from Micronesia? As a self-governing state, Micronesia will continue to look to America: for representation and protection in international affairs, for material and human assistance in the affairs of government, both in times of

crisis and in day-to-day operations. As a self-governing state, Micronesia's needs will be as great or greater than as a Territory. We do not underestimate the problems we will face. We do not wish for any lessening of American concern for Micronesia or of American presence in Micronesia.

How, then, will America benefit by entering into association with Micronesia? How can Micronesia hope to reward continued American contributions to its development? We would point out--without the slightest suggestion of self-righteousness--that there was an element of trust, of moral obligation, involved when the United States undertook responsibility for these islands, and that such an obligation, which was begun when these islands were in ruins, should not be ended when they are reaching for political maturity.

Yet there is one item of material value which Micronesians can offer the United States--an item which is most precious in Micronesia and to Micronesians: the use of their land. Micronesians recognize that their islands are of strategic value, that the United States may require the use of some areas for purposes of military training and defense. We have seen the strategic value of these islands, have seen them conquered in historic battles, have seen them used for nuclear experiments and missile testing. Our experience with the military has not always been encouraging. But as a self-governing state in free association with the United States, we would accept the necessity of such military needs and we would feel confident that we could enter into responsible negotiations with the military, endeavoring to meet American requirements while protecting our own interests.

Relinquishing use of land, accepting the presence of large numbers of military personnel, accepting the risk of treatment as a target area by a hostile power in war are not conditions to be lightly undertaken. But as a self-governing state we would be far more prepared to face these prospects than as a Trust Territory.

Thus, with a sense of the profound responsibilities upon all concerned, the Political Status Commission repeats its recommendation that Micronesia be constituted as a self-governing state in free association with the United States.

To turn this recommendation into reality, we must face long and complex negotiations. The United States may be called upon to make unprecedented provisions and accommodations, but we are confident that they will meet with us openly and in good faith. From the time it acquired territories in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, through the settlement of the continental United States, the acquisition of Alaska and Hawaii, Puerto Rico and other island areas, the United States has dealt flexibly and imaginatively with its territories. It has shown a willingness to evaluate each territory as a separate case--and Micronesia surely is that.

For ourselves, we look forward to the success of future negotiations with the United States. But if these negotiations should fail, if it should not be possible to achieve the alternative we recommend, then we have only one remaining course. It is the second alternative mentioned in the Trusteeship Agreement, an alternative which might bring economic hardship and administrative difficulties. That alternative is independence. Independence is not the alternative we now recommend, but if it should prove impossible to renew our partnership with the United States as an associated free state, the Political Status Commission feels that independence would be the only road left open to us.

In the times to come, we will look to the United States for friendship and aid; but, whatever our relationship with the United States, whether as an independent nation or an associated free state, we must also look to Micronesians, look to ourselves. We maintain that the basic ownership of these islands rests with Micronesians and so does the basic responsibility for governing them.