

August 2, 1971 12

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August 2 Statement by Marianas District  
Legislature President Vicente Santos

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*Saipan*  
8-4-71

*Handwritten scribbles*

District Administrator and <sup>*illegible from telegram*</sup> Mrs. Ada, ~~Honorable~~ Members, my colleagues,

ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to once again welcome you to the opening of our Regular Session of the Mariana Islands District Legislature.

As we move into this Sixth Regular Session, we must continue working in a spirit of cooperation with our District Administration for the betterment of our people. The recently concluded Pre-Session Budget Hearings conducted by the Appropriations Committee is an excellent example of the teamwork which has prevailed during these past months among members of the Legislative and Executive Branch of the District Government. We have worked together effectively to inspire development in this district.

While there may, from time to time, be disagreements over certain methods of approach, we have been able to discuss our differences of opinion in a mature, rational and unemotional way. In carrying out our respective responsibilities, the welfare of the people should be the basic consideration, that certainly has guided our efforts.

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DECLARATION

In my last opening remarks to the Legislature, I discussed the accomplishments realized at the half way point in our administration.

With the spirit of cooperation on the part of the Congress of the United States, and officials in the Departments of State and Interior, we have seen the signing by President Nixon of "The Micronesian Claims Act of 1971." This action brings to an end the efforts started by this Legislature in August, 1965—just 6 short years ago. ~~During this period, many sacrifices have been necessary by many many people.~~

As we close this chapter on the passage of the war claims bill, I wish my deep gratitude and appreciation to each of you for the dedicated assistance in this important piece of legislation. When I recall the negative attitudes expressed by officials in Washington when the first Marianas delegation went to Washington in March, 1966, there is no doubt in my mind that without your sustained assistance and cooperation over the years, this war claims law would be in the waste basket.

This body and its leaders have been the subject of much criticism for undertaking and continuing this effort—but the membership of this body

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is to be commended for its determination and dedication. By any standards, this legislative body has come of age, and will continue to be an instrumental force in seeking justice for our people.

In the months ahead, I consider it extremely important that we commit this Legislature to full involvement in the political, economic and social issues facing our people.

With the change in the Secretaryship in the Department of the Interior, we can expect new emphasis on and perhaps a new approach to our old problems. The several visits made to the Trust Territory by high level officials clearly indicate this to be the case. Experience has shown, however, that most officials in government only do as much as they are, for one reason or another, forced to do. I ask your assistance in "keeping the pressure on" in those areas where injustices remain.

The recent visit to the Trust Territory by Ambassador Franklin Hayden Williams, President Nixon's personal representative to the future political status negotiations, highlighted the political field since our last session. His visit to the Marianas was helpful, but not necessary because the

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majority of the people in this district favor a permanent association with the United States of America. This future political association is not negotiable.

Under the present political arrangement, we are a stateless people—a people who are without a country—indeed without any international identity whatsoever. This fact of our statelessness was personally experienced by me recently when I visited Europe. This experience made me more determined than ever to make certain that our children must not be condemned to the same fate. In order to accomplish this great task, we must expend all our energies to achieving a permanent status for our people.

As was stated earlier, this year, at the close of our Fifth Regular Session, we are hopeful that the wishes of the Mariana Islands District for a permanent association with the United States of America can be achieved within the framework of the Congress of Micronesia and the current status negotiations. Now that our representatives on the Future Political Status Delegation of the Congress of Micronesia are unified in their representation of the expressed political aspirations and wishes of the people of the

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Marianas, we are content to await the outcome of current negotiations.

Should it appear, however, that the people of the Marianas will be forced to live under any form of government other than one that is in permanent association with the United States of America, then we will have no alternative but to establish our own government independent of the other five districts.

L We are hopeful that this will not be necessary.

In June of this year, I appeared before the Trusteeship Council in support of a petition filed with that body over two years ago. This petition was based on the report of the Select Committee on Land Problems in this district. I am happy to report that we were well received by the Council and made out an excellent case on the injustices committed against our people. However, I am not satisfied with the explanations later supplied to the Council by the administration. So, I wish to recommend for your consideration this session, the reactivation of the Select Committee on Land Problems to update its data and determine in depth the current magnitude of land problems in this district. With these results, we will again appear before the Trusteeship Council if the administration continues to ignore these critical and

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pressing problems.

In my opinion, the land problems faced by the people in this district are not legal in nature, but administrative. The institution of proper management practices would resolve 80% of our land problems, but the continued refusal of responsible officials to deal honestly with this critical problem only further complicates this delicate problem.

To illustrate the magnitude of this problem, we have on file a memorandum dated September 3, 1964 from former District Administrator Roy T. Callmore, where admitting that 189,410 square meters of private property was located within the roadways and highways on Saipan. Another document admits that the government owes at least several thousands square meters to private owners in the exchange of their lands after the close of World War II.

My office is visited daily by people who claim that they were cheated by the government in the exchange of their lands, but are unable to get any satisfaction from the government in solving their complaints. Since it is said that the government is decentralized, I invite the District Administrator to deal effectively with these problems without further delay.

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Based on present attitudes by high officials in the administration, I consider it essential that we continue to maintain our contacts with officials in the Department of the Interior and with the United States Congress. In this connection, I will be asking this Legislature to continue to retain our Washington Counsel, Attorney William L. Kohler. Experience has shown that we have to take all necessary steps to protect our own interests.

It should be noted that other Micronesian leaders are beginning to see the extent to which the <sup>High Commissioner</sup> administration intends to deal fairly with the people of Micronesia. I refer to the statements issued by the Senators in the Congress of Micronesia from Truk after the veto of the Merit System Act, the Public Defender's Act and the Consent Act, all passed by the Congress of Micronesia during its Special Session on Truk.

All of these events clearly indicate that the Trust Territory is entering a new era, and the leaders must be ready and able to meet these new challenges if we are to survive.

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The High Commissioner's veto on those very important acts of Congress is an indication of his administration's continual denial of equality and honesty of the Micronesian people.

Another example of the High Commissioner's disregard of the desires and wishes of the people of the Marianas was his recent decision to disregard the disapproval by the District Land Advisory Board of Air Micronesian's request to construct a hotel near Micro Beach. This Legislature has unanimously adopted a resolution requesting that the same property be reserved for public facilities as a public park. We urge our district government to honor our request and the decision of the District Land Advisory Board. How long will important decision affecting our lives and our future be made by outsiders who are here today and gone tomorrow?

Thank You

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