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Statement Released at Majuro May 9, 1973 by Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams,  
President Nixon's Personal Representative for Micronesian Status Negotiations

I have been in Majuro the past two days at the invitation of the District Administrators to discuss with them the negotiations on a future political status for Micronesia. We discussed the meetings I held in Honolulu last Friday and Saturday with Senator Lazarus Salii and Congressman Ekpap Silk, respectively Chairman and Co-Chairman of the Congress of Micronesia's Joint Committee on Future Status, to review progress in the negotiations to date and to plan for further movement toward a resolution of the status question. The Honolulu talks were useful and productive. We agreed on some intermediate steps which must be taken between now and the time--tentatively set for late this summer--when our full delegations will jointly turn to the task of completing a draft compact of free association. In the meantime the Co-Chairman and I will be holding a series of informal meetings in preparation for the resumption of work on the compact.

The United States had been prepared to resume full negotiations this month, when a new element which requires careful study was introduced into the negotiations by the Joint Committee. I was informed that it had now become the position of the Joint Committee and the Congress of Micronesia that the current political status negotiations cannot go forward unless and until all public land in Palau is returned to the traditional chiefs in that district in trust for the people.

This issue is new only with respect to timing, not substance. The United States Government's position on public land is clear. We stated at Hana that all Micronesian land belongs to the Micronesians, that its control should rest in the hands of Micronesians, that it is our intention that all public land will be returned to Micronesians, and that ultimate responsibility for the disposition of public land should rest with Micronesians.

We had assumed that the wishes of the people of Micronesia regarding control and disposition of land would be reflected in a Micronesian constitution and in the subsequent decisions taken by duly constituted authorities at the central and district levels. Now the Joint Committee and the Congress of Micronesia want the United States to undertake the task of returning public land to Palau. The United States intends to consider this suggestion carefully. Naturally, we must weigh it in relationship to all of Micronesia's districts. The real question is to whom or what entity in the districts the land should be returned.

Because of the multiplicity of differing land traditions among the various districts, the return of the public lands is a complex question requiring extensive consultation and reflection. We are proceeding to examine it and will be soliciting the views of all those having expertise in this field--the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands administration, the Congress of Micronesia and the Joint Committee, and officials and private citizens leaders at the district level. While I do not know what the ultimate decision will be on the timing of the return of the public lands, I can assure you that the United States will want to be responsive to the wishes of the people of Micronesia and their leaders at the various levels of government.

Many Micronesians consider the question of political unity to be the most important issue faced by Micronesia today. The problem is basically one which the Micronesians must resolve for themselves. However, the United States has pursued the future status negotiations with the Joint Committee on Future Status in the hope and expectation that a common status will be forthcoming for the Marshalls and the Carolines. The United States will continue to hope that out of these negotiations, and, more importantly, out of the deliberations within Micronesia regarding the nature of your future government, will come a united

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Micronesia. We continue to believe that despite considerable cultural diversity and differing local problems and interests, a unified Micronesia would best meet the economic, social, and other needs of the people concerned. I would like to renew our frequent earlier suggestions that the Micronesians and their leaders begin soon the process of framing their future government in order to define, among other things, the division of authority between the central government and the districts, laws on matters pertaining to land, and policies with respect to collection and distribution of revenues.

Throughout the negotiations on Micronesia's future status there has been a constancy of United States purpose and policy. The United States intends to live up to its treaty commitment. The United States has an obligation to the people of the Trust Territory to give them an opportunity to choose freely their own future. The United States intends to fulfill that obligation. While we have said that the Micronesians will have the full right of self-determination, that sovereignty resides in the people of Micronesia, it is also our responsibility to see that they are not stampeded into a decision on future status by vocal minorities urging one solution or another. On the other hand, we have no desire to delay an early resolution of the future status question. We favor an orderly transition to full self-government and termination of the trusteeship agreement on a time-table approved by the people concerned--the Micronesians themselves. The United States therefore stands ready to continue to work cooperatively with the Joint Committee on Future Status, with the leaders and people of Micronesia, toward a status agreement reflecting the true will of the people.

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