

SALII - WILLIAMS

MAJURO--(MNS)--Ambassador Franklin Hadyn Williams and Senator Lazarus Salii met with the six Trust Territory district administrators Tuesday (May 8) at their semi-annual Dis-Ad Conference in Majuro, the Marshall Islands District Center. The two met separately to brief the DistAds on the current situation with regard to the talks on Micronesia's future status. However, a joint meeting involving both men before the Dis-Ads was not held.

Ambassador Williams, President Nixon's Personal Representative for Micronesian Status Negotiations, spoke first. He said he is impressed by the growing feeling of self-confidence for self-government that is becoming apparent in Micronesia.

Williams informed the conference that the next round of status talks has been postponed in timing by the declaration of the Palau chiefs regarding the return of all public lands in that district to the people.

"I have been informed by the Joint Committee on Future Status that the next round of talks cannot continue forward unless all public lands in Palau are returned to the traditional chiefs to be held in trust for the people of the district," Williams said. He added that the United States Government has no difficulty in considering this in principle.

"What poses a problem," the Ambassador said, "is that the United States is requested to consider one district and not all the other districts. The issue is not return of public lands as such, but when and to whom these public lands should be returned."

"The question of the return of public trust lands to the districts will be studied by the United States in consultation with appropriate and interested authorities and with individuals in the TT administration, the Congress of Micronesia and the districts," he stated.

On the question of Micronesian Unity, Ambassador Williams said that the United States does not intend to impose unity in Micronesia. The U.S. believes, however, that a unified Micronesia will be best for the people of Micronesia. Ambassador Williams emphasized that the U.S. Government does not intend to rush Micronesians into their decisions on the status issue, not does it intend to delay the resolution of the Trusteeship Agreement.

Following the session with Ambassador Williams, the DistAds heard from Senator Lazarus Salii, Chairman of the Joint Committee on Future Status. Senator Salii formally announced during the meeting that his committee will be holding hearings in the districts during July "to check the people's mood on the draft compact of free association, and to get some directions for the next round of talks."

Senator Salii said the committee will be divided into two groups, to hold hearings in the Eastern and Western districts at the same time. The Eastern group, which will be headed by co-chairman Ek-pap Salk of the Marshall, will include Senator Bailey Olter (Ponape), Senator Tosiwo Nakayama (Truk), Senator Petrus Tun (Yap) and Congressman Herman Q. Guerrero (Marianas). The Western group, which will include the other members of the joint committee, will be headed by Salii himself.

Senator Salii indicated that the committee will not be able to hold hearings in many of the outlying areas of the Trust Territory, but, he said, they hope to meet with legislators and other leaders in each district who will be representing the views of their people regarding the status question. The Senator said that present plans call for hearings on Ebeye, Kusafe, Rota and Tinian in addition to the district centers.

With regard to the problem of Palau's reaction to the public land question, Senator Salii informed the DistAds that since United States options to use Palau land for military purposes were specifically mentioned in the present draft compact of association, the declaration of the Palau leaders on the subject in effect "blocks" further progress on the talks. He said, however, that he is hopeful that a solution to

the problem can be found, so that the next round of talks can take place.

Senator Salii said the joint committee is seriously considering the possibility of negotiating with the U.S. delegation an arrangement whereby the U.S. may negotiate directly with the district for the use of land.

Following the meetings, District Administrator Oscar DeBrum of the Marshalls made a comment with regard to the status issue. He said the Joint Committee on Future Status has not involved itself on the grass roots level. The Marshalls district legislature's resolution regarding separate talks was to focus attention on the local scene. The Marshalls effort is not to secede from the union, although that possibility is not ruled out, he said. It is to bring the status issue to the people, where the ultimate decision must be made.