

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE FRANKLIN HAYDN WILLIAMS  
CHAIRMAN OF THE AMERICAN DELEGATION AT THE OPENING PLENARY  
SESSION OF THE MARIANAS - U.S. STATUS TALKS, MAY 15, 1973

in Vincent  
Mar. II  
12  
5

Senator Pangelinan, members of the Marianas Political Status Commission, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen: As the representative of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government and speaking on behalf of all the U.S. delegation I would like to say how happy we are to be here to join with you again in the common task of fashioning a new political status for the northern Mariana Islands. Since our last meeting in December 1972, we have been busy, as you have, preparing for the days of discussion and decision that lie ahead of us.

In this process we have sought the assistance and advice of concerned Executive Departments and Agencies in Washington, key members of the Congress of the United States and the White House. In every quarter and at every level the American Government appreciates the aspirations of the people of the Marianas and welcomes the prospect of their membership in the American political family. I thus bring you warm greetings from both the Executive and Legislative branches of the United States Government.

As we move from ceremony and the preliminaries to the substance and the practical realities of framing an agreement I think it would be useful at the beginning to keep in mind the larger perspectives of Pacific and world affairs. It should be remembered that the U.S. has certain legal responsibilities for the maintenance of peace and security in the Pacific Ocean area and clear legal rights and powers to enable it to carry out these responsibilities.

At the same time, the U.S. has assumed certain obligations to the people of the Trust Territory -- to promote their social, political and economic well being and to provide them with an opportunity to choose their own

political future. These are clearly set forth in the Trusteeship Agreement and the Charter of the United Nations.

I would like to assure you that the U. S. intends to live up to its responsibilities as well as its obligations.

With respect to the latter the U. S. has encouraged political unity in the TTPI and sought to promote a common future political status for all of Micronesia. This was the policy consistently followed by the U.S. until last April when the decision was finally made to respond positively to the repeated requests of the Marianas District for separate status talks. It was not easy to make this exception. It was based on the long post World War II history of the desire of the people of the Marianas for political union - a desire that had been expressed over a period of twenty years to the United States, the United Nations and more recently to the Congress of Micronesia. It was based on the conviction that in view of this long history, refusal of the Marianas' request and forcing them into a future relationship against their will would constitute a denial of their own right of self-determination.

These efforts culminated in the opening session of the Marianas Political Status negotiations which took place on Saipan last December. The December session was characterized by warm expressions on both sides of the table and a determination to move forward expeditiously toward your goal of political union with the United States.

Our task now is to translate these expressed sentiments, the language of past resolutions and petitions, and the results of referenda into the precise language of agreement defining your future legal status within the American governmental system.

**031980**

Initially your stated preference ran toward political union with the Territory of Guam. Later your representatives supported the concept of Commonwealth and the offer put forward by the U.S. to all of Micronesia in May 1970. After a study of possible status alternatives you have informed us that commonwealth is now your preferred position. We want your choice to be representative of the wishes of your people. We are confident that your desire for political union can be realized under a commonwealth arrangement within the guidelines laid down in the American Constitution.

We pledge ourselves to work with you toward this end. We look on the task as a common one - as a joint effort. We do not view these talks as adversary proceedings.

We hope that we will be able to move forward steadily toward an agreement. Over the period of time immediately ahead we hope that we will be able to reach preliminary understandings and possibly even tentative language to be included in a draft agreement.

Now we have started, we will want to keep working toward our common objective steadily and purposefully until we have completed a draft agreement which can then be submitted to the people of the Marianas for their approval. At the same time we do not wish to rush you. We feel that it is most important that you and your constituents be given ample time and opportunity for careful and thoughtful consideration of all aspects of the status question.

Here again we share a common responsibility to keep the people informed and to be responsive to their wishes. In the end it will be they who will judge our efforts as they exercise their right of self-determination.