

Talks End Week One

News Saipan Staff

SAIPAN - Representatives of a U.S. delegation met for a fourth straight day of negotiations with Mariana Islands leaders here yesterday afternoon with the talks designed to bring the islands into the "American political family."

President Nixon's personal representative, Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, did not attend, having been ill since Tuesday. Working sessions so far during this second round of talks have been led by James M. Wilson, deputy U.S. representative. There was no official word on substance of the closed meeting.

Sources said the Marianas Status Commission met privately for a three-hour meeting yesterday morning to discuss a position to be taken on land matters later in the talks, expected to last another two weeks. Unsolved land problems have existed since U.S. Naval administration days and they may be a major hurdle in the discussions. The same sentiments were also put forth to the United Nations visiting mission that toured the territory in February.

At the end of the first week of talks yesterday, one Marianas delegate compared the talks - described in official statements as "free, frank, and searching exchanges" - to a poker game where opponents reveal "all their cards to the other players."

"Independence seems to be a bad word to local politicians," he said, "and for us, a basic weakness. If we cannot consider independence to any extent, at least in our own minds, then we cannot survive."

Political Status Is The Servant

Political status is one of the issues that confronts Guam's development-and Puerto Rico has been that road, the audience at the Guam Economic Conference was told yesterday.

And the lesson for Guam, said Alex Maldonado, is that the issue of political status "is not an ideal-it is a tool.

"The purpose of the people is not to be some particular thing, a state, or a territory; it is to achieve a good civilization. Political status should be the servant-not the master."

Maldonado is the associate editor of El Mundo, the Spanish-language newspaper of San Juan, and was one of three members who discussed the Puerto Rican experience in a morning session.

Puerto Rico obtained its commonwealth status in 1952, "a permanent union" in which the status can only be amended by agreement from both sides, the people of Puerto Rico and the Congress of the U.S.

Things are still "far" from ideal in the tiny commonwealth-high unemployment (11 per cent), massive slums and a discontented middle class.

"But I think finally we are on the right road," Maldonado said.

"The lesson of commonwealth to Guam is: Begin by and with great perception, asking 'What is your reality?' and 'What is your goal?' Then, and only then, choose a status that will serve that goal."

In related remarks, Felipe Viscasillas, a Puerto Rican economist, said the advantage to Puerto Rico of the commonwealth status is the "great flexibility" it gives... "important because we are so different (from the U.S.) in so many respects." And the commonwealth status allows special treatment, such as on minimum wage, and petroleum import quotas.