

United States Department of the Interior
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20249

June 29, 1973

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Dear Mr. President:

Pursuant to your instructions I met on Saipan from May 15 to June 4 with the Marianas Political Status Commission to conduct negotiations aimed at establishing a close and permanent relationship between the Northern Marianas and the United States. This was the first substantive round of talks since the brief opening session last December launching the effort toward political union, which I reported to you on January 5, 1973.

The common objective in the Saipan talks, which were conducted in a cordial but business-like atmosphere, was to reach preliminary understandings on the basic principles underlying the future U.S.-Northern Marianas relationship. We agreed at the outset to defer to subsequent negotiations discussion of the precise language of a formal status agreement.

The following brief summary of the discussions on Saipan notes under each of the major agenda items the areas of preliminary understanding and some of the questions which require additional study:

1. The Political Relationship. It was agreed that, assuming a final agreement endorsed by the people of the Marianas and the U.S. Congress, the Northern Marianas will become a commonwealth of the United States under a territorial relationship in which sovereignty over the Marianas will be vested in the United States Government. The U.S. will have responsibility for defense and foreign affairs. The Northern Marianas will exercise the maximum possible control over local affairs under a locally-drafted constitution providing for a bill of rights, separation of powers, and a popularly-elected chief executive. While the judicial systems of the Marianas and the U.S. will be compatible and consistent with federal law, the Marianas will have the right to establish local courts for purely local matters. It was agreed that further joint study is necessary on the applicability to the Marianas of specific U.S. laws, the precise extent of self-government to be exercised by the Marianas consistent with the U.S. Constitution and relevant federal legislation, and the status to be accorded those residents of the Marianas who might not wish to become U.S. citizens.

2. Economics and Finance.

It was agreed that the Northern Marianas' goal should be economic self-sufficiency and that the U.S. will assume certain obligations.

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to provide... the new commonwealth... from its own resources. The U.S. delegation indicated that for the long term the Marianas' needs can best be met through the annual U.S. budget review/appropriations mechanism and through the extension to the Marianas of federal programs and services for which they might become eligible under a commonwealth arrangement. In response to the Marianas Commission's insistence that extraordinary circumstances relating to the start-up costs of a new government require a specific U.S. financial commitment, we agreed that the U.S. will guarantee a specific minimum level of budget support for an initial period of years. No figures, however, were mentioned. The quantum of support and its duration are to be settled in subsequent negotiations.

It was agreed that prior to the next round of talks a joint working committee will examine prospective local revenues in the Northern Marianas, including the substantial increase in income anticipated from U.S. military activities, as well as the likely scale of an adequate capital improvements program and other operations of the new commonwealth government, to determine the actual extent of the Northern Marianas' need for financial assistance. The Marianas Commission is eager to draft at an early date detailed long-term economic development and government reorganization plans. The U.S. delegation emphasized, of course, that any financial commitments it might make are subject to approval by the U.S. Congress.

3. Land

The U.S. reiterated its intention to return to the people of Micronesia the public lands now held in trust for them and assured the Marianas Commission that priority consideration will be given to the early return of these lands in the Marianas District. Recognizing the importance of land to the people of the Marianas, the U.S. proposed that means be found to prevent the alienation of land in the Northern Marianas to people not of Marianas ancestry.

The Marianas Commission explicitly acknowledged that the U.S. has a legitimate need for land in the Northern Marianas for military purposes. The Commission appeared to accept the U.S. requirement for a sizeable base on Tinian, as the majority of the people of that island seemed to do. On the other hand, the Commission's initial reaction to the U.S. delegation's exposition of the full U.S. military land requirements, put forward in their entirety pursuant to your instructions, was that the U.S. should try to accomplish its purposes with less land than it is now requesting on Tinian and Saipan.

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As instructed, I will continue informal consultations with key members of the U.S. Congress to keep them up to date on the negotiations and solicit their comments. I will also take up with them the Marianas Commission's intention to seek Congressional approval of a non-voting delegate in the Congress representing the Northern Marianas exclusively. However, the burden of presenting the argument for such Congressional representation will properly fall on the Marianas Political Status Commission.

Although the political relationship between Guam and the U.S. Government falls outside my area of responsibility, I have kept the executive and legislative branches of the Government of Guam informed about developments in the U.S.-Northern Marianas negotiations. While the Guamanian political leadership had in previous conversations professed polite interest but no deep concern about these negotiations, in my most recent consultations on Guam immediately following the recess in the Saipan talks, the Guamanian leadership and the local press evinced considerable chagrin that the Northern Marianas are being offered a commonwealth relationship while Guam, which has been a U.S. territory since 1898, remains in what they labelled an "inferior" status. The Lt. Governor and some members of the legislature vowed that Guam would immediately begin representations to Washington regarding a change in Guam's status. Earlier in the spring, of course, the Governor of Guam had created an Advisory Council on Political Status, and the local legislature had established a Political Status Commission. Present comment on Guam suggests that some among Guam's political leadership would like to see Guam reconsider its earlier disinterest in union with the Northern Marianas, though there is no indication of what proportion of the Guamanian elite may share that sentiment. On the other side of the equation, there is strong evidence that unlike two or three years ago, the Northern Marianas have little present interest in amalgamating with Guam.

My purpose in mentioning Guamanian reactions to the U.S.-Marianas negotiations is to draw to your attention the growing ferment on Guam regarding its political status and to suggest that the U.S. Government begin giving thought now to how the U.S. should respond to what I think will shortly become very persistent requests from the Guamanians to refashion that status.

The United Nations Trusteeship Council has been critical of the separate negotiations between the Northern Marianas and the United States. A Visiting Mission which toured Micronesia in February on the Council's behalf submitted a critical report to the Council while our Saipan talks were actually in

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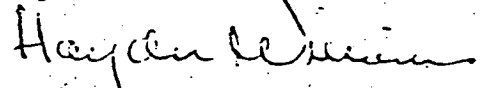
progress. Such adverse comment has not affected the Mariana Political Status Commission from its commitment to these negotiations. Following the resumption of the talks on Saipan the Commission sent two of its members to New York to appear effectively before the Trusteeship Council that the promise of self-determination contained in the U.N. Charter and the trusteeship agreement required that the people of the Northern Marianas be permitted to negotiate with the U.S. a status separate from that of the rest of Micronesia. In its summary statement and recommendations to the Security Council last week, the Trusteeship Council indicated continued unhappiness with the separate U.S.-Northern Marianas negotiations but acknowledged there is strong sentiment in the Northern Marianas for separate status.

I shall continue to give priority attention to the early conclusion of a final status agreement between the U.S. and the Northern Marianas. While no precise date has been set, the two delegations have agreed to meet again late this summer or early fall to resume work toward that end. During the intervening months joint working committees from the two delegations will work intensively on some of the more complex technical questions relating to the application of federal laws, finance, and land which have been identified as requiring further study. These joint inquiries should go far toward ensuring that the next series of formal talks is as productive as both sides presently anticipate.

Enroute to Saipan I met in Honolulu with the Chairman and representative of the Joint Committee on Future Status, the body with which the U.S. is attempting to negotiate a new status for the rest of Micronesia. We agreed our two delegations would try to resume work on the partially completed draft compact of free association later this year, possibly in late September or early October. The Chairman of the Joint Committee and I agreed to meet frequently in the intervening period to discuss informally matters relating to the agenda our full delegations will take up. We have already met twice since the Honolulu discussions, with much of our conversation relating to methods by which the U.S. might return to local control the public lands held in trust for the people of Micronesia. Well before the two delegations resume discussions the Under Secretaries Committee will forward to the White House an in-depth study of prospects for these further negotiations with the Joint Committee which will include recommendations for your consideration and approval.

Attached to this letter is the joint communique issued at the end of the negotiations with the Mariana Political Status Commission on Saipan which will serve to amplify some of the points I have made about the negotiations.

Very respectfully yours,


Franklin Haydn Williams

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