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STATEMENT FOR HOMESTEADING ISSUE

We are certainly aware of the local concern about the homesteading program on Saipan and are sympathetic to the feelings of the residents that more should be done to insure that homesteaders receive title to the lands on which they have fully complied with the legal requisites. However, this matter is outside the jurisdiction of the Office for Micronesian Status Negotiations and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on it, especially in light of recent litigations here on Saipan.

I will note, however, that the homesteading program is a part of the United States study of proposals made by your Marianas Political Status Commission that would establish a public corporation to handle all homestead matters and handle land management for the new Commonwealth Government of the Marianas. We are, in fact, now studying the whole public lands policy and program in the Trust Territory; and as you know, I have instructed my deputy, Mr. James Wilson, to institute a full, and comprehensive study on this matter. The land team just completed its fact finding mission to the Marianas and is now studying the various matters brought to its attention by local groups.

We will produce a final study on this matter in short order, but I can state that from our initial findings, this issue may require a new reorientation of priorities in the TTPI homestead program as well as the public land policy as a whole.