

PACIFIC DAILY NEWS, Wednesday, November 14, 1973-

# Land Delays Opening Of Status Talks

Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON--Disagreement over legal procedures for transferring public lands to local Micronesian control Monday caused a postponement of the formal opening of status negotiations here.

Spokesmen for the Interior and State Departments said the differences are more technical than substantive, but the start of the talks was moved back to Wednesday. The exact time is still not certain.

U.S. Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams and Palau's Sen. Lazarus Salii, chairman of the Congress of Micronesia's Joint Committee on Futrue Status, have planned an informal closed session Tuesday morning in hopes of settling the public lands question prior to the fanfare of the official opening.

Williams and Salii met informally yesterday at the Interior Department in what was expected to be a routine discussion of ground rules, agenda and administrative details. They emerged after more than an hour and told their spokesmen that problems with the public lands issue would require another informal closed session.

Both sides have accepted the idea that they should settle the public land matter before the seventh round of talks officially starts.

Public lands include all property acquired over the years by the ruling governments of the island--Spain, Germany, Japan and the U.S., which manages them now under a U.N. trusteeship. Public lands also include tidelands, marine lands and property taken from Japanese interests after World War II.

The "public lands" designation applies to 90 per cent of the Marianas, 69 per cent of Palau, 66 per cent of Ponape, 17 per cent of Truk, 13 per cent of the Marshalls and 4 per cent of Yap districts.

Last week, the U.S. made official its plans to transfer the public land from the control of the Trust Territory government to the districts of Micronesia--with the exception of U.S. military lands in the Marianas that are now the subject of special negotiations.

The U.S. announcement asked the Congress of Micronesia to enact whatever laws are needed to carry out the early transfer of the lands. It also asked each district legislature to determine the public's wishes with regard to returning the land and who should control it locally.

The U.S. program for returning these lands takes into account "the inadequacy of existing land data and boundary descriptions involving public land," as the statement on the transfer put it. To overcome this confusion, the federal government has asked the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory to undertake a three-year survey of public lands to define their boundaries and values.