

AMBASSADOR WILLIAMS' STATEMENT
AT THE
OPENING PLENARY SESSION
November 14, 1973

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As we open this seventh round of negotiations on Micronesia's future political status, the U.S. Delegation renews its commitment to continue to work with you faithfully and constructively to develop a status agreement which will be in the mutual interest of Micronesia and the United States. Our two delegations have already travelled a long road together toward a satisfactory final agreement. I have no doubt that as we labor together purposefully in the days ahead we will make further substantial progress toward our common objective.

At Barber's Point a little over a year ago we jointly decided that a pause in the talks would be appropriate. It was felt that time was needed to enable each delegation to reexamine its position in order to determine whether the premises which had initially prompted it to embark on a joint effort to construct a compact of free association remained valid, and assuming that the answer was affirmative, to prepare adequately for the further negotiations required to bring these talks to fruition.

This pause has been longer than perhaps either side had originally anticipated. Its length was occasioned by circumstances unforeseen at Barber's Point, relating initially to the Joint Committee's understandable need for time to

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reconstitute its membership following the November 1972
elections to the Congress of Micronesia and then

subsequently, to the Joint Committee's desire to have the U.S. consider, prior to the resumption of these negotiations, a complicated issue not directly related to future status yet of considerable importance to every Micronesian -- that is land, and the early transfer or return of title to local Micronesian entities.

The past year has not been wasted. It has in fact produced significant progress in moving the Micronesian people several steps closer to self-government-- and that, of course is, in a fundamental sense, what these negotiations are all about. During the past year members of the two delegations have discussed informally with each other and with the TT Administration and elements of the U.S. Government, issues germane to Micronesia's transition to self-government. These discussions have contributed to critical decisions bearing directly on Micronesia's move toward self-determination. In this regard I would like to comment briefly on three important recent actions.

First, political education. It is apparent that an expanded, objective, informational and educational program is essential to prepare the Micronesian people to perform responsibly and in their own interest the act of self-determination which they will ultimately be asked to

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exercise. We therefore welcomed the High Commissioner's announcement in October of a major new "Program of Education for Self Government".

We believe that this program is a major, timely and indeed essential step in preparing further the people of Micronesia for their essential full responsibility for governing their own affairs. It deserves encouragement and support, and in this regard I have fully endorsed the Department of the Interior's request to the U.S. Congress for supplementary funds for an augmented program.

The second major area of important decisions taken in the interim since Barber's Point concerned the subject of our meeting yesterday - land. There is no necessity for me to replough the ground already covered. However, in the context of my brief review of recent actions designed to encourage the Micronesian people along the path to self-government, it will suffice merely to emphasize again the far reaching and historic implications of the decision regarding land taken in the past two weeks by both sides.

In essence, after an interminable period of waiting stretching back over the years indeed the centuries, Micronesians now have the opportunity and responsibility to control in accordance with their own laws and customs, the most precious commodity in all of Micronesia - land. If self-government can be defined as the individual's right to

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make decisions on those matters which concern him most directly and have greatest salience for his society, transferring to the Micronesian people control over their public land must be considered as nothing less than an enormous step in the direction of self-government.

Finally, let me mention an action which, though still largely prospective, nonetheless should be included in any list of major recent developments influencing Micronesia's future. I speak of the letter I received from the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of the Congress of Micronesia informing me of the intent of the Congress to consider again legislation calling for the early convening of a constitutional convention.

On behalf of the U.S. Government I welcome again this possibility, recalling that the American delegation first urged the calling of such a convention during the Koror talks in April 1972. A request for financial assistance has now been received and in order to lend concrete encouragement to the Congress' efforts, I have with pleasure recommended to the Secretary of the Interior that a supplemental appropriation be sought immediately from the U.S. Congress to help defray the costs of a constitutional convention.

* In the absence of a Micronesian constitution, planning and implementation of any design for transition to self-government can at best be only uncertain and incomplete. On the other hand, the very act of holding a successful convention at which a wide spectrum of Micronesian citizens will be engaged in constructing the foundation and framework of the future Micronesia, will in and of itself constitute a monumental citizen participation in self-government, bringing to the Micronesian people invaluable experience and additional confidence in their capacity to determine without outside interference their own affairs and their own destiny.

The three decision items mentioned do not directly relate to these status talks but do relate to the direction in which Micronesia is moving, i.e. self-determination & self-government.

It is this same goal that has brought us together again to complete our unfinished task.

As we take up this work I would like to reaffirm that the U.S. objective for these talks remains constant. We have said that we have legal commitments and moral obligations which we intend to live up to. We have also said that we have legitimate national interests which we do not intend to ignore.

At Hana I underscored a theme which continues to be basic to the U.S. negotiating position. I said that the U.S. was only interested in developing the kind of framework for future U.S.-Micronesia relations which would meet the needs circumstances and desires of the people of Micronesia and which would win their support. To do otherwise would be to build an edifice on sand, a structure whose foundation would gradually erode and in time be washed away.

In May of this year, I noted in a public statement at Majuro that the U.S. will fulfill its promise to the Micronesian people to ensure that they have the opportunity to choose freely their own future - and I underline the word freely. I said that the U.S. would neither rush the Micronesians toward a decision on future status more quickly than they wished, nor would the U.S. attempt to delay a resolution of the future status question. I concluded by renewing the U.S. pledge "to continue to work cooperatively with the Joint Committee toward a status agreement reflecting the will of the people".

This remains the U.S. position this morning. We are prepared to press on with the negotiations toward a Compact of Free Association. We recall that it was the Joint Committee which first proposed that such a future association be developed via the negotiating process. We recall further that the Congress of Micronesia has several times since confirmed its belief that a free association arrangement would be most compatible with Micronesia's aspirations and requirements:

During recent months you have no doubt reflected upon the nature and substance of the negotiations and the direction in which they are leading. The U.S. side is aware of course, that members of the Joint Committee visited all of the districts last summer to consult directly with the Micronesian people on their expectations regarding future status. That undertaking on your part, supplementing your individual reflections and your internal consultation as a body have doubtless given you added perspectives on the attitudes and the sentiments of your people.

Speaking about our sentiments, I would like to repeat that we do not wish to impose ourselves or our friendship on Micronesia. We seek instead an association not based on the narrow limits of legal, political and economic considerations or self-interest but rather a relationship based on mutual respect and trust, a relationship which the people of Micronesia would understand, would want, and would enter into freely with hope and enthusiasm.

As we prepared for this meeting we have tried to keep this ideal in mind. We have tried to view each issue as it might be perceived by Micronesians as well as from the perspective of the American interest. We continue to believe that we share a number of important common interests. We continue to believe also that your understandable and commendable goals of Micronesian self-government can be met within the framework of the kind of political association we have been working toward.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that by the end of this month we will have finished our task of drafting a blueprint for a new relationship which will prove to be mutually beneficial and which will recognize, respect, protect and further the long-term interests of Micronesia.

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