

No Snags Seen As Talks Open

Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON -- Negotiating teams of the U.S. government and the Congress of Micronesia formally opened the seventh round of status negotiations here Wednesday with pledges to reach a new relationship of "free association" between this country and the Trust Territory.

U.S. Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams opened the plenary session with a six-page statement reaffirming this goal and expressing the 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."

Sen. Lazarus Sali of Palau, chairman of the Micronesian delegation, responded with a shorter statement which said the

chances for the success of the seventh round in achieving the compact of free association had greatly improved with the agreement Tuesday on the basic points of the proposed return of public lands to local control.

"Our delegation pre-conditioned the resumption of these talks upon the return of the so-called public lands in Micronesia to their rightful owners," Sali said.

"And now that the land question is out of the way, the task before us is to complete drafting the compact of free association. There is no reason that this task cannot be completely in a short period of time. Both sides have more than one year to formulate their positions on the remaining issues of finance and termination."

Sali added the only humor to the formal ceremony when he said, in urging quick work on the compact, "I do not find this

great capital city objectionable in any great respect, but your weather is a bit too cold for our warm blood." After the laughter, he said, "you can therefore be assured that our delegation is prepared to wind up these sessions in the shortest amount of time possible for several reasons."

Sali called the public lands agreement "a commitment on the part of the United States that it will return the so-called public lands to the districts in Micronesia immediately," but he said the actual return of the lands "will, out of necessity, have to be held in abeyance for a few months pending certain actions on the part of the Congress of Micronesia and the district legislatures.

Micronesia and the Interior Department have asked Congress for \$800,000 to carry out a three-year survey of lands to determine boundaries and ownership. Public lands,

which make up an estimated 60 per cent to the land on the islands of the six districts Micronesia, are those which have belonged to the ruling governments there--Spain, Germany, Japan and the Trust Territory of the Pacific Island which the U.S. manages under a United Nations trusteeship.

Williams observed that the talks were resuming after a pause of more than a year since the Barber's Point round in Hawaii in August 1972. Besides the Micronesian elections and the efforts to settle the public Lands question, Williams said, the lapse of more than a year has also provided the chance for informal discussions of "issue germane to Micronesia's transition to self-government."

Williams cited plans for providing greater political education among the 107,000 people on the 2,100 islands in the territory as an important

sign of progress. He also pointed to the public land agreement and the plans to conduct a constitutional convention as evidence of movement toward self-determination. Williams said he is happy to support the proposed \$450,000 U.S. appropriations to help pay for the convention.

"We are prepared to press on with the negotiations toward a compact of free association," Williams said. "...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."

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