

Reach Status Talks Accord

Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — Leaders of U.S. and Micronesian negotiating teams said yesterday they have reached agreement on transferring public lands to local control and will open round seven of formal talks today on the future status of the Trust Territory.

A statement issued by U.S. Ambassador Franklin Hayden Williams and Sen. Lazarus Sali of Palau, chairman of the Congress of Micronesia's Joint Committee on Future Status, said they "met and reached agreement on the basic principles relating to the transfer of title to Micronesian public lands to the districts of Micronesia."

The delegates announced agreement after more than 2½ hours of meetings behind doors. Paul Warnke, a Washington lawyer and former Assistant Secretary of Defense who has been hired by the Micronesian congress, sat in on the session to advise them.

"Both delegations noted that they look forward to the early implementation of this policy regarding the return of public lands," the joint statement said. "The two delegations will resume work on the draft compact of free association when the seventh round of status negotiations formally begin Nov. 14 with a plenary session."

Shortly after the morning meetings wound up, several

members of the U.S. and Micronesian groups traveled up to Capitol Hill to testify before a House Appropriations Subcommittee on a request for at least \$8.2 million in supplemental money.

That sum includes \$800,000 to carry out an official survey of the land, its ownership and value in the six districts of Micronesia, and a requested \$450,000 to help set up the planned Micronesian Constitutional Convention.

Among those testifying were James M. Wilson, the deputy to Ambassador Williams, Edward Johnston, High Commissioner of the Trust Territory, Stanley S. Carpenter, Director of Territorial Affairs for the Interior Department, Rep. Raymond Setik, Chairman of the Micronesian Congress' Joint Committee on Program and Budget Planning, Rep. Bethwell Henry, Speaker of the Micronesian Senate and Sali.

Both Wilson and Sali had more to say to the appropriations subcommittee, headed by Rep. Julia Butler Hansen, D-Washington, than they had been willing to discuss earlier at the Interior Department. Mrs. Hansen's hearings, though crowded, were open.

"The present negotiations are aimed at formulating a new relationship of free association between the people of Micronesia and

the United States under which they would be responsible for their own internal affairs and we would be responsible for their foreign affairs and defense," Wilson told the subcommittee.

"A new constitution, which entered into effect even before termination of the trusteeship would not only represent a further step towards self-government but provide a practical blueprint for the post-trusteeship period," Wilson said.

Sali, in response to questions from Rep. Frank Evans, D-Colorado, said he expected the constitutional convention to be held before next July. He said the decision to have one was not dependent on the outcome of the status negotiations, but he hoped they would result in an agreement that would encourage the success of such a convention.

Legislation authorizing the convention awaits action in the Congress of Micronesia which meets on

Saipan in January. "Free association" is an undefined relationship that the U.S. and Micronesians generally agree is the goal they are striving for in this round of talks. The sixth round was in October 1972 at Barbers Point, Hawaii.

The current talks could well be the culmination of the drive for "free association." The public lands question was not on the agenda of this round, but both sides agreed to try settling it before starting the talks.

About 60 per cent of the

land in the TT is considered "public land," which means it has belonged to the previous foreign governments of the Trust Territory — Japan, Germany or Spain — or is considered tide land or marine lands.

Returning it to local control involves securing the legal right of district legislatures and local communities to received and hold title to the land, a technical process that was understood to be the subject of yesterday's informal bargaining.