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OPENING PLENARY STATEMENT

OF

AMBASSADOR FRANKLIN HAYDN WILLIAMS

CHAIRMAN OF THE U. S. DELEGATION

December 6, 1973

Senator Pangelinan, Members of the Marianas Political Status Commission, Mr. High Commissioner, Mr. Ada, Father Arnold, Reverend Williams, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen, we are very pleased to be back in your islands again. We all very much appreciated the wonderfully warm welcome we received on our arrival at Kobler Field yesterday afternoon, and it gave us all a good feeling to see friends again and by now familiar sights as we drove to our hotel along your beautiful beach road. In May and June the flame trees glorified your land and seascapes and now the colorful poinsettias remind us of the coming Holiday Season and Christmastime. Yes, for all of us, it is good to be with you again.

Before proceeding with my opening remarks, Mr. Chairman, I would like to have the pleasure of introducing the members of the American Delegation. Most of them are known to you, a few are new and will be participating for the first time in these negotiations. (introduced members of the U. S. Delegation)

Last year we came to Saipan to begin these negotiations. This year we have come to the Marianas twice to continue the effort. Next year, hopefully, we will return to finish the job.



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As we proceed, I believe that it might be useful to review why we are here and what are our principal objectives. I believe that it might be helpful to remember at the outset that the American delegation is here at your invitation, and as a direct result of the oft-repeated requests of the people of the Northern Marianas, through their municipal councils and their District Legislature, for separate negotiations and a separate status.

We are here to pursue the attainment of a future status which you have asked for--and that is political union with the United States.

We are here to attempt to accommodate these expressed wishes within the framework of a commonwealth agreement, which will provide for maximum internal self-government within the context of the larger American political system.

We are here to work toward understandings that will mean in the future that the Northern Marianas under its own constitution will elect its own executives and its own legislature and will have its own judiciary for the administration of local justice.

We are here to work with the Marianas Political Status Commission to ensure that in the future individual civil rights will continue to be guaranteed and protected and that there will be equal opportunities for all.

We are here to find ways to preserve and protect your own cultural traditions and identity. Under a new status we wish to give the people of the Northern Marianas also the right to become American citizens if they so desire.

We are here to discuss the future economic needs of the Northern Marianas, to reach agreement on how best the United States can assist in raising standards of living and how best the United States can contribute to your long range goals of economic self-sufficiency.

We are here to bring assurances that the United States intends to provide your new government with basic budgetary support to meet the cost of government administration, education, health and other essential public services. Likewise, we will be proposing the extension of long term, low interest loans for economic development, and under the status which you have indicated is your first preference, you will be eligible for a wide range of United States federal programs and services ranging from disaster relief to "head start" type programs.

As we take up these tasks it is also important and comforting to remember that we will be building on foundations and preliminary understandings reached last May and June about the essential political nature of the new relationship between the Northern Marianas and the United States. We can now turn from general principles to

more technical specific and practical considerations. This will involve a review of some remaining political status questions of a legal and constitutional nature, a deeper and fuller exploration of economic needs and support requirements, and a further discussion of land questions including the disposition of public land, land alienation and the satisfaction of United States land requirements.

We will also be suggesting that some of our time over the next two weeks be spent on the subject of Transition. If the Northern Marianas are to move forward toward a new status progressively and in a timely way, it is important to begin planning now. The United States is prepared to explore with you in detail how it can appropriately assist in this effort. It is our assumption that United States financial assistance will be necessary for both the planning and implementation stages of your major steps toward full self-government and we expect to discuss with you in these talks the character and level of our support.

As we open these talks we are confident that further progress will be made in the days immediately ahead. We are here as friends and not as adversaries. We share in common a great challenge, a great opportunity to fashion a new and lasting political relationship between the Northern Marianas and the United States--one which will serve the vest interests of your people and one that will be entered into freely as a true expression of their right of self-determination.

In conclusion, let me say that we appreciate that our talks have been marked by good will and uninterrupted progress. We look forward to further steady advancement toward our ultimate objective, yet the United States recognizes that the pace of our negotiations must be set essentially by the people of the Northern Marianas and their leaders.

Finally, in closing, I bring to you all greetings and best wishes from your many friends in the United States in both our Executive and Legislative Branches of Government.

Thank you.