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MARIANAS POLITICAL STATUS NEGOTIATIONS
THIRD SESSION - OPENING PLENARY
DECEMBER 6, 1973
ROYAL TAGA, HOTEL, SAIPAN, MARIANA ISLANDS
TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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OPENING OF SESSION - By Senator Edward DLG Pangelinan (Host Chairman)

INVOCATION - Father Arnold Bendowske

OPENING REMARKS - Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams

OPENING REMARKS - Chairman Edward DLG Pangelinan

BENEDICTION - Reverend Max Williams

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The Third Session of the Marianas Political Status Talks between the Marianas Political Status Commission and the President's Personal Representative for Marianas Status Negotiations was officially opened at a plenary session held at 10:00 A.M., Thursday, December 6, 1973, at the Royal Taqa Hotel, Saipan, Mariana Islands District, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands.

The following is a transcript of the opening statements made by Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, the President's Personal Representative and Senator Edward DLG Pangelinan, Chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission.

AMBASSADOR WILLIAMS: Senator Pangelinan, Members of the Marianas Political Status Commission, Mr. High Commissioner, Mr. Ada, Father Arnold, Reverend William, 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.

(At this point Ambassador Williams introduced the members of his 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.

As we proceed, I believe 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 Mariana Islands, 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 a 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.

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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 Mariana Islands 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 best interests of your people and one that will be entered into freely as a true expression of their right of self-determination.

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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.

SENATOR PANGELINAN: Ambassador Williams, Members of the U.S. Delegation, Honored Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Marianas Political Status Commission, it is my pleasure to welcome you here to continue the deliberations which we began last December looking toward a close political relationship between the people of the Marianas and the United States.

The members of the Commission are proud of the progress which the two Delegations have made in only a single year. The Joint Communique of last June 4, 1973 -- reflecting three weeks of intensive negotiations -- has provided a clear and solid foundation for our further deliberations. Speaking for the Commission and the people of the Marianas, I am confident that this third session of our negotiations will show even greater progress toward our mutual goal -- a secure and enduring place in the American political family for the people of the Marianas.

Since the beginning of these negotiations, the members of the Commission have been in constant communication with the people of the Marianas. We are well aware that these negotiations will serve no useful purpose unless the status agreement which we negotiate is approved by the Marianas District Legislature and the people in a referendum. We are confident that the people of the Marianas support the tentative agreements which we have already made. Our most recent public discussion with the people was only three days ago, when the Commission met with the people of Tinian for a full and frank discussion of these negotiations and the U.S. proposals regarding land on Tinian. After these negotiations are concluded, the Commission plans to undertake a series of similar meetings in the various municipalities and villages of the Marianas.

As before, much work has been undertaken in preparation for these negotiations. Some of this work has been helped by the meetings in Washington of the joint working groups established by the parties pursuant to the terms of the Joint Communique of last June 4. As we get closer to specific final agreements, we believe that these working groups will become even more important. In addition, the members of the Commission have been meeting continuously for the past ten days in preparation for the session.

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One development of special significance since our last session is the U.S. Policy Statement on the Return of Public Lands. On behalf of the people, the Commission wishes to commend the United States for issuing this statement and promising to honor its long-standing commitment to return the public lands to the people of Micronesia. The Commission will make a proposal during these negotiations aimed at achieving the prompt transfer of public lands in the Marianas to the people. In some respects, we will need the assistance of the U.S. Delegation in the project and we hope that the United States will aid our efforts to implement the U.S. Statement of Policy on this important subject.

Our agenda for this session will include that familiar quartet of topics -- political status, financial support, land and military needs, and transition. On some of these subjects, the Commission has proposals; on others, we expect that the United States will take the initiative in submitting proposals or responses to positions previously advanced by the Commission. Whichever is the case, the Commission is committed, as always, to free and open discussion aimed at making as much progress as is possible in the very short time -- two weeks -- which we have available for this session. Where specific agreements are possible, the Commission is prepared to try to arrive at them. Where complicated subjects are involved and the necessary staff work has not been done, it may be wise to settle for more general agreements and a joint determination to work together during the recess so that we can make further progress at our next session of negotiations.

Whatever the outcome of our discussions of specific issues, you can rest assured that the members of the Commission remain firm in their conviction that we are engaged in an historic joint venture. Let there be no doubt in your minds regarding the enthusiasm with which the people of the Marianas face their future relationship with the United States. And it is with that spirit - Mr. Ambassador - that we welcome you here today and look forward to these negotiations.

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