

74

12
6

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Marianas Political Status Commission,

I open this initial plenary session by reiterating what I said this morning at the ceremonies marking the beginning of these important talks. We are honored that you and your people, acting in a free and democratic fashion in the exercise of your right of self-determination have chosen a path leading toward a close and permanent political association with the United States. We are sincerely grateful for the trust you have shown us and are fully cognizant of our obligation to measure up to the important challenge before us of framing a relationship which will justify the faith you have placed in my country.

We have travelled to your Islands in response to your initiative and your invitation . The events leading up to our presence here this afternoon began more than ten years ago. Today marks the end of a long campaign on your part for recognition of your long held desire for a permanent solution of your

06-418082

future political status. But the end is also the beginning for all of us as we commence the formal process of negotiations to attain your stated objective.

Speaking for myself and the members of the American delegation, we wish to pledge to you our full cooperation in proceeding deliberately but without delay toward a satisfactory agreement. We represent the Executive Branch of the United States Government. While I cannot, of course, speak for the American Congress, I can assure you that we will be in close consultation with the leadership of both our House and our Senate upon our return and during the course of these talks. Their understanding and support is of course essential since any solution we might reach will be subject to both Presidential and Congressional approval.

On your side of the table we note with satisfaction that the composition of your delegation is broadly representative of the people of the Marianas, that your Commission has both public and

private members, and representatives drawn from all of the principal islands and municipalities of the District. We have also noted and wish to congratulate the Marianas District Legislature on the manner of appointment that was followed in naming the members of the Commission. This democratic process should assure that the wishes and the voices of your people will be considered and heard during these talks through their representatives on the Commission.

I would like to repeat for emphasis one more thing which I said this morning. In the end, the product of our efforts will be presented to the people of this District for their approval. They have the inherent right of self-determination and any agreement to be entered into must be based on their freely expressed wishes. This is the basic premise under which we will approach these talks and under which we will be proceeding.

Let me turn now to the question of what we hope to accomplish in this initial meeting of our two delegations. First, we hope that our very

presence will demonstrate the serious intent of my Government to take due account of the political aspirations of the peoples of the Marianas and their desire to become a permanent part of the American family. Second, we hope in this organizational meeting to set forth basic procedures for the conduct of these talks and to discuss a timetable for future meetings. And finally, we hope to identify major areas for further study in preparation for our subsequent meetings through open exchange and listening to you.

We have been informed that you prefer not to go deeply into substance or into details and specifics in advance of your having adequate time to conduct your own studies and your own internal consultations. We therefore have not brought with us any concrete proposals to lay before you. After hearing your preliminary views we will be in a better position to concentrate our efforts on answering your questions and on preparing for presentation to you at our next formal session, precise proposals to serve as basic departure points for our negotiations.

We are aware of your understandable interest in the nature and form of the political relationship which will emerge from our talks and in particular the terms under which you will govern your own internal affairs within the framework of the larger American system.

We also recognize the importance of the financial considerations and future arrangements that relate to your economic needs and your orderly future growth and development. Further we understand your desire to explore your eligibility and your access to the U. S. federal system with its wide range of programs and services. There will be important items on our future agenda as well as such other issues as trade and foreign investment and the provision of adequate protection and support to your new government and people as the Marianas enters into a new relationship with us.

Your land is of particular importance to you. We recognize this. Special consideration should and will be given to safeguarding your interests in your land and the future control and disposition of the public lands in the Marianas now held in public trust. We will also be discussing with you our requirements for land for defense purposes and arrangements for meeting same on a fair and equitable basis. Finally, we wish to discuss and share with you the problem of land alienation, and how the people of the Marianas interests and titles to their own lands can best be protected and preserved for the future.

You have already this afternoon outlined a number of questions in each of these important and basic areas. Some of them

can be addressed in a preliminary way at our working session tomorrow. Others will require more time and study and exchange in advance of our next formal round of talks. All of your questions are helpful to us and we will be prepared to provide you with our position on each of them prior to or at our next meeting of the two delegations.

For the present I would like to limit my remaining remarks to the following broad and general statements touching on the areas of future status, finance and land.

As you know, Guam, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands all vary to a greater or lesser extent in terms of their relationship with the Federal Government and their internal governmental structure. Their differing characteristics stem from certain historical factors, the stage of their development, and other considerations and circumstances which are particular to the territory concerned. Different names describe their particular political organization and relationship to the United States. These range from unincorporated and unorganized territorial status to commonwealth. As models, they are interesting, but the important thing to remember is that their political status has not remained static. Evolutionary change reflecting changing conditions has modified the legal and political relationships between these members of the American family and the Federal Government with the result that progressively they have enjoyed greater self-government and increasing participation in the political life of the Republic.

Leaving political labels aside, let me point out that all of the political entities under the American flag, different although they may be, still enjoy certain things in common (1) certain basic rights as provided

by our Constitution, (2) certain basic guarantees as American citizens and nationals, (3) certain basic obligations, and (4) certain basic benefits.

The areas that have become linked with the United States have profited from the association and from the material as well as the intangible benefits which have been the fruit of our national political life and our progress and prosperity. As part of a larger democratic system, the resources of the American Government have been brought to bear on the problems and needs of its territories just as with the states of the union. This same sharing in both obligations and benefits would apply in the case of the Marianas once the new relationship which we are contemplating has been consummated.

The exact nature and terms of our future association remain to be worked out. You have in the past at various times expressed an interest in more than one type of association, including separate territorial status and reintegration with your neighbor to the south. You have also indicated your approval of the basic principles underlying the American Commonwealth proposal of May 1970 which was offered to all of Micronesia. Such a structural framework, tailored specifically to the Marianas would afford you a full measure of internal autonomy with regard to local affairs and certain guarantees and privileges stemming from your membership in the American system including basic benefits of a financial nature.

In looking ahead to our fuller and more detailed discussion of finance, I would simply like to say at this time that we are not thinking in terms of a quid pro quo but rather in terms of a joint exploration of needs on one hand and resources to meet them on the other. While financial arrangements and budgetary support from federal sources would be subject to Congressional approval and the annual budgetary process, we foresee on the basis of past practice continuing assistance being provided to the Marianas along the following lines; Federal grants to your government matching the revenues collected locally, additional budgetary support as may be required until such time as the Marianas would have developed an adequate tax base, and the provision of the full range of federal programs and services which are available to all the states and territories of the U. S. for such things as public works, health and education, housing and other programs of an economic and social nature designed to improve the quality of life of the American people and the American nation.

In brief, I can assure you that the future financial needs of the Marianas and your concern for the kind of economic progress that will benefit your people will be given every consideration during these talks, and afterwards since I envisage your Islands becoming ultimately an integral part of the larger American system. You should thereby derive those benefits which accrue from such a status just as other parts of the American nation do.

Let me turn now to the question of land. We recognize full well how deeply the people of the Marianas feel about their land, and how important it is to their future.

As you know a large percentage of Marianas land is public trust land

and we are well aware of your concern about the disposition of this land upon a change in your political status. We hope as part of these negotiations to arrive at agreements which will provide for the Federal Government's future ~~military~~ land requirements in the Marianas. Subject to this caveat, we expect that all remaining public lands in the Marianas would be transferred to the new government of the Marianas. At that point the responsibility for use or disposition of these large land holdings would reside in the people of this District and your own political and legislative processes.

In a similar vein, we share your concern about the threat of land alienation under a new status. We are determined to work with you to find ways to protect against the alienation of your land. It is our expectation that under any form of close association, the people of the Marianas would become U. S. citizens, if that is their desire. Accordingly, any land safeguards which we are willing to work with you on must take into consideration the U. S. Constitution. We are studying this problem carefully and are confident that in our forthcoming discussions jointly with you a plan that will meet your particular needs while remaining consistent with the U. S. Constitution.

Now a few brief remarks about U. S. military land needs. The general statements which I made at Hana, Maui, in October 1971 regarding the Marianas remain valid, but will, of course, require considerable elaboration as the negotiations proceed.

The DOD is currently making a series of studies aimed toward specifically identifying future military land needs in the Marianas.

Moreover, cultural and socio-economic considerations will be very much a part of this review. As the negotiations move to detailed discussions, the U. S. Delegation will be prepared to present specific proposals designed to satisfy the U. S. military needs while taking into account the basic interests of the people of the Marianas.

As stated at Hana, the U. S. current thinking is to consolidate its military activities as much as possible on the Island of Tinian in order to avoid as much disruption as possible of normal civilian activities throughout the rest of the Marianas. Current plans call for the development of a joint service--AirForce-Navy-Marine Airfield/Logistic Facility on the Island of Tinian and to rehabilitate Harbor. It is possible that much smaller and limited activities such as maintenance, communications and logistics support facilities might be developed on Saipan at Isley Field and Tanapag Harbor.

We anticipate that the Marianas will derive side benefits as well as direct payments for lands used as a result of a U. S. military presence. To begin with we will attempt to structure any base planning so as to provide maximum employment opportunities for the local people.

In addition to the monies paid for land and improvements, the tangible fringe benefits of civilian employment, local purchases and military payrolls will contribute to your economy. Moreover, the associated infrastructure will likewise benefit local residents, e.g., roads, docks, dredging, etc.

In closing this very preliminary discussion of military land requirements, I should stress that my government is fully conscious of the need to consider local problems and to work hand-in-hand with you to work out ways for achieving our objectives with maximum harmony and a minimum of trouble to the people of the Marianas. At the same time I should emphasize that Congressional authorization and funding are required to implement any defense proposals for base facilities in the Marianas which we may negotiate. Such plans will not proceed toward implementation until this necessary step has been taken.