

Williams Extends 'Welcome' To Marianas

SAIPAN — U.S. Ambassador Franklin Haydn Williams, in a speech at the conclusion of the negotiations between the U.S. and the Marianas Political Status Commission, has said that if the negotiators' covenant is approved the Marianas people would be "welcome" in the "American family."

Williams was the personal representative of the President at the status negotiations.

"If the people of these islands, choose in a free election to approve the commonwealth covenant, the United States would be proud and pleased to welcome you into the American family as its newest member," Williams said.

Earlier in the ambassador's remarks he explained some of the details of the covenant. The complete text of his talk follows:

"We are gathered here this afternoon at the close of 15 days of hard work and steady progress toward our common objective which is a new political status for the Northern Marianas. In my statement at the opening plenary session of the 5th round of these negotiations on Dec. 5, I said that 'We must do our utmost—all of us—to see that correct and continuing information on our talks is available to those most directly concerned—the people of the Northern Marianas.'

"I said further that the people, all of the people, had a right to know and a need to know the facts about these negotiations since in the end it will be they and not us who will be making the final decisions here in the Marianas with respect to their own future.

"With this obligation in mind it gives me pleasure to be able to report to the people of the Northern Marianas this afternoon on our work over the past two weeks. The record of our achievements is to be found

in the draft covenant which is being released this afternoon along with a joint communique which summarizes the understandings we have reached.

"The commonwealth covenant is an open document for all to read. It is also provisional in the sense that there are a limited number of sections which both the Marianas Political Status Commission and the United States wish to review carefully before we meet again and before we formalize the understandings by signature of the covenant. The signing of the covenant will then mean that the commonwealth agreement is ready for referral to the Marianas District Legislature and after that to the people for popular vote which will be an exercise of their free choice and their full rights of self-determination.

"I will not attempt to review this afternoon the details of our agreements which have now cleared away all of the important remaining issues standing in the way of final understandings and an agreed covenant. As indicated in the opening statement of the chairman of the Marianas Political Status Commission, one of the major remaining questions was land.

"I am happy to report that building on our earlier understandings full agreement has now been reached between us on the question of the return of public lands, land alienation, the leasing of lands to the United States government for defense purposes the price to be paid for these lands, and the provisions in the covenant dealing with eminent domain.

"I am also pleased to report that the United States in fulfillment of its statement that it did not want its lands on Tinian to lie unused pending later development of the base, has agreed to lease back to the future government of the northern Mariana Islands and to private individuals some 2,648 hectares or 6,458 acres on Tinian for farming and grazing and for other purposes which will not conflict with future military activities.

"These leasebacks at a nominal sum hopefully will encourage the expansion of agriculture in order to meet local demands for fresh food products and also the growing export market for food in nearby Guam and in Japan.

"On Saipan under the terms of the covenant the United States will lease approximately 72 hectares (177 acres) in the Tanapag Harbor area for contingency military purposes. There are no present or future military plans for this area and therefore the United States has proposed that 44 acres be leased back to the government of the Northern Mariana Islands and

that 133 acres be turned into an American memorial park to honor those American soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines and those from the Northern Marianas who lost their lives in World War II in these islands.

"I am proposing to my government that the \$2 million to be paid for the lease of this land be placed in trust and that the income be used by the future government of the Northern Mariana Islands to develop and maintain the area for the pleasure and the welfare of the people of the Northern Mariana Islands and as a proper memorial to those we are honoring.

"Isley Field, which is now military retention land, will be returned to the public domain along with 485 acres of military retention land adjacent to and south of the runway and, altogether, in the Northern Marianas, including Tinian, some 13,649 acres will be returned. This means that the title to all military retention lands will have been returned to the Marianas.

"Over the years the U.S. military has steadily released and returned land to the Trust Territory government to be held in trust for the people. All military retention lands have now been returned in Palau, Yap, Truk, Ponape and the Marshalls. In the Marianas a total of 19,756 acres was returned prior to 1971. When the 13,849 acres of remaining military retention land in the Marianas is returned to the people of the Marianas, the total acreage which will then be under military lease and/or use throughout all of Micronesia will be less than 3 percent of the total land in the Trust Territory.

"I mention this for the record to indicate that the United States does appreciate the importance of land to the people of the Marianas and to all of the people of Micronesia. Too much attention has been focused on some nonsubstantive land issues and at times the public's attention has been diverted to land issues that are not issues at all. On the other hand, the commission's concern and determination to protect your people's interest and your future generations' interests in land has been legitimate, and your stance has won our respect and our approval.

"Rather than commenting further on land agreements and our further agreements in the area of the financial assistance that will be provided I would like to concentrate the remainder of my remarks on the heart of the covenant, those basic provisions which in long-range terms are far more important to you and your children than the more transitory provisions relating to

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grants of money and payments for land. I speak of the political elements of the covenant and what these provisions will mean for your future.

They clearly mean that you will be a part of the American political family living under a democratic form of government based on the oldest constitution continuously in force in the world today. It means that you will be governed by certain provisions of this constitution, by those treaties and laws of the United States applicable to the Northern Mariana Islands and by your own constitution, which will be drawn up and ratified by the people of the Northern Marianas. Yours, like ours will be a constitution that will be based on the consent of the governed.

The political history of the United States shows the federal government's respect for local government, and it is the spirit of the Congress of the United States not to interfere in local affairs. The people of the Northern Marianas, however, should know that their representatives of the Marianas

Political Status Commission have consistently taken steps to assure that the language of the covenant provides maximum protection for the rights of the people of these islands to govern themselves and to have in the future, under a commonwealth status, full responsibility for matters of purely local concern.

This means the Northern Marianas will have its own elected chief executive, its own elected lawmakers, its own laws, its own courts and its own judges—and it is important to note that the fundamental provisions of the covenant dealing with the rights of self-government cannot be changed without mutual consent.

This is what the covenant means in terms of the rights of the people to organize their own government and to govern themselves.

While the individual in the Northern Marianas will not have, normally speaking, much direct contact with the federal government, the provisions of the American Constitution, in particular the Bill of Rights, will provide him with protection as

to his basic civil rights. This protection will be no less than that provided anyone living under the American flag.

These basic rights guaranteed in the Constitution of the United States will be incorporated in the Constitution of the Northern Marianas and in your own bill of rights in accordance with the terms of the covenant.

These basic human rights include:

- Freedom of religion.
- Freedom of speech.
- Freedom of the press.
- Freedom of assembly.
- Freedom of petition.
- Freedom from unreasonable seizure and search.
- And protection against being deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law.

These are old familiar words which have become the hallmark of American democracy. They are too often taken for granted, but they are there when needed by any citizen or by any national of the United States. Other rights that will be enjoyed by the future citizens of the Northern

Marianas will be the right to travel freely to and from other parts of the United States, to reside and work in the United States, to participate fully in the political life of any community in the United States in which the person resides, including the right to vote if one is a citizen of the United States.

When traveling abroad the people of the Northern Marianas who are either citizens or nationals of the United States will also enjoy the full privileges and immunities that go with an American passport.

I have only touched on some of the more obvious aspects of the importance of the political sections of the covenant. They need to be studied carefully and understood if the people are to make an informed judgement about their future. In the long term it is these provisions, that is, the meaning of becoming a citizen or a national of the United States, that are of the greatest importance to the citizens of these islands for the immediate future and for time to come.

In the end, if the people of these islands choose in a free election to approve the commonwealth covenant, the United States will be proud and pleased to welcome you into the American family as its newest member.

People from all parts of the

world still are seeking entry into the United States and the privilege of eventually becoming citizens of the United States through the naturalization process. You will be given this opportunity via the ballot box, and if it is your wish to become a part of the United States, you will enrich, I am sure, our national life as we have countless millions of others who have chosen freely to become Americans.

In large measure the strength of our country derives from the diversity of its people and you will add to this strength if it is your will to join us.

Let me close by thanking all of those who have made our stay so pleasant and to all of the members of the Marianas Political Status Commission for their courtesies, their understanding, and their dedication to the serious challenge and responsibility given them by their people. This afternoon we come not to an end just of two weeks but to the years of hard work.

We have reached a significant milestone with agreement in all important areas and we look forward to a final culmination of our common endeavor in the early part of the coming year. Finally, we all thank you again and, to one and all, a very merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

