

SAIPAN FEB. 15 (MNS)---A COVENANT ESTABLISHING A COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS IN POLITICAL UNION WITH THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA WAS SIGNED ON SAIPAN FEBRUARY 15. THE SIGNING CLEARS THE WAY FOR SUBMISSION OF THE DOCUMENT TO THE MARIANAS LEGISLATURE FOR ITS CONSIDERATION. AFTER APPROVAL BY THE LEGISLATURE, THE COVENANT WILL BE VOTED ON BY THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN MARIANAS. BOTH HOUSES OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS WILL BE ASKED TO APPROVE THE COVENANT FOLLOWING COMPLETION OF THE MARIANAS' PORTION OF THE RATIFICATION PROCESS. THE SIGNING TOOK PLACE IN THE FILLED AUDITORIUM OF THE MOUNT CARMEL SCHOOL WHERE THE FIRST ROUND OF MARIANAS POLITICAL STATUS NEGOTIATIONS BEGAN IN DECEMBER 1972.

IN HIS REMARKS DURING THE PUBLIC SIGNING CEREMONY, THE PERSONEL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, AMBASSADOR F. HAYDN WILLIAMS READ MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF INTERIOR. PRESIDENT FORD'S MESSAGE EXTENDED HIS "WARMEST CONGRATULATIONS TO THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS AS THEIR REPRESENTATIVES SIGN A COVENANT OF POLITICAL UNION WITH THE UNITED STATES." THE PRESIDENT CONTINUED, STATING THAT "OVER THE PAST QUARTER CENTURY YOU HAVE CONSISTENTLY FOUGHT TO FORM A CLOSER UNION WITH THE UNITED STATES. WE HAVE WELCOMED THAT DESIRE WHICH IS EMBODIED IN THE COVENANT WHICH WE SIGN TODAY. THIS COVENANT, THE PRODUCT OF ALMOST THREE YEARS OF COOPERATIVE DISCUSSIONS, RECOGNIZES BOTH OF OUR INTERESTS IN THIS NEW RELATIONSHIP. THE UNITED STATES LOOKS FORWARD TO AN ENDURING AND MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL UNION. WITH WARM GOOD WISHES, GERALD R. FORD."

AMBASSADOR WILLIAMS DREW ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT THE SIGNING ENDS ANOTHER CHAPTER IN THE LONG HISTORY OF THE DESIRE OF THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTHERN MARIANAS FOR POLITICAL UNION WITH THE UNITED STATES, A STORY WHICH BEGAN MORE THAN TWENTY FIVE YEARS AGO. THE OPENING OF FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS LEADING TO THE COVENANT SIGNED TODAY, AMBASSADOR WILLIAMS STATED, BEGAN FOLLOWING CREATION OF THE MARIANAS POLITICAL STATUS COMMISSION BY THE DISTRICT LEGISLATURE IN 1972. THE STATUS COMMISSION IS A BROADLY REPRESENTATIVE BODY CONSISTING OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES, THE DISTRICT LEGISLATURE, AND SUCH IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AS THE CAROLINIAN COMMUNITY AND THE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, THE AMBASSADOR STATED THAT INSTALLATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTHERN MARIANAS UNDER THEIR OWN CONSTITUTION COULD TAKE PLACE AS EARLY AS THE SUMMER OR FALL OF 1975. THE TIMING WILL DEPEND ON THE SPEED WITH WHICH THE COVENANT MOVES THROUGH THE RATIFICATION PROCESS AND THE DISTRICT LEGISLATURE CALLS A CONVENTION TO DRAFT A CONSTITUTION. THE DATE FOR THE PLEBISCITE, WHICH WILL BE OBSERVED BY THE UNITED NATIONS, HAS NOT BEEN SET, BUT IT IS HOPED THAT IT WILL TAKE PLACE IN THE LAST TWO WEEKS OF JUNE 1975.

MARIANAS POLITICAL STATUS COMMISSION CHAIRMAN EDWARD DLG PANGELINAN EXPRESSED HIS PLEASURE THAT THE NEGOTIATIONS HAD BEEN SUCCESSFULLY CONCLUDED AND STATED THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE MARIANAS ARE PREPARED FOR SELF-GOVERNMENT. HE CONTINUED, SAYING THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE MARIANAS ARE PREPARED TO "EMBRACE THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION AND ITS BILL OF RIGHTS" BOTH THE AMBASSADOR AND CHAIRMAN PANGELINAN SPOKE OF THE NEED TO FULLY INFORM THE PEOPLE OF THE MEANING OF THE COVENANT SO THAT THEY CAN EXPRESS THEIR

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COLLECTIVE WILL IN AN ACT OF SELF DETERMINATION DURING THE PLEBISCITE.

IN ADDITION TO THOSE SIGNING, DIGNITARIES IN ATTENDANCE INCLUDED LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR OF GUAM RUDY SABLAN, GUAM SENATOR VICENTE (BEB) ADA, THE TRUST TERRITORY HIGH COMMISSIONER AND DEPUTY HIGH COMMISSIONER, EDWARD E. JOHNSTON AND PETER T. COLEMAN, MARIANAS DISTRICT ADMINSTRATOR FRANCISCO T. ADA. THE INVOCATION WAS GIVEN BY HIS EXCELLENCE FELIXBERTO FLORES, BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF AGANA; THE BENEDICTION BY REVERAND MACK WILLIAMS, PASTOR OF THE SAIPAN COMMUNITY CHURCH.

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