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NOTES

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E A S T A S I A

NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH COVENANT SIGNED

A "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America" was signed on February 15 in Saipan. The agreement marks the culmination of negotiations which began in December 1972. When approved by both the Northern Mariana Islands and the United States, and upon termination of the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement, the agreement will make the group of islands, adjacent to Guam, a self-governing Commonwealth under US sovereignty.

Northern Marianas Have Long Sought Close US Ties

The Northern Mariana Islands presently constitute the Mariana Islands District of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI), which is administered by the United States under a trusteeship agreement with the UN Security Council. Beginning in 1950, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands, through resolutions of the elected Mariana Islands District Legislature and other petitions, have repeatedly requested a close political association with the United States. When the Joint Committee on Future Status of the Congress of Micronesia in 1971 rejected a US offer of commonwealth status for all of the Trust Territory, the Mariana Islands District Legislature requested separate negotiations for their region to make possible such a political union.

Basic Provisions of the Covenant

The Covenant provides that the US will give direct grant assistance to the Government of the Northern Mariana Islands for an initial period of seven years at the level of \$14 million a year. In addition, the US will make available the

full range of programs and services available to the territories of the United States.

The USG will lease approximately 18,182 acres of land for defense purposes, of which 17,799 acres are on Tinian Island. A substantial portion of this land will be leased back to the Government of the Northern Mariana Islands at the sum of \$1.00 per acre per year, to be made available for purposes such as farming, grazing or other activities compatible with its future possible military use. At present, the major planned use for the land on Tinian is for ground, sea and air training exercises. There are no present plans to construct any permanent structures or to station military personnel on Tinian. Present plans call only for minimum upgrading of San Jose Harbor and West Field.

Commonwealth Agreement Passes First Step in Approval Process

The Mariana Islands District Legislature unanimously passed a resolution on February 20, 1975 which approved the Covenant for submission to the people of the islands in a plebiscite. A date for the voting, to which the United States will invite the UN Trusteeship Council to send observers, has not been set. If the Covenant is approved by the voters, it will then be presented to the United States Congress for its consideration and approval. The Northern Mariana Islands would not achieve Commonwealth status until such time as the Trusteeship is terminated. The US has informed the UN Trusteeship Council that it intends to terminate the Trusteeship Agreement simultaneously for all parts of the Trust Territory and not for one part separately.

Negotiations with the Rest of Micronesia

The US is engaged in negotiations with the Joint Committee on Future Status of the Congress of Micronesia, looking toward a future political relationship of free association between the US and the other districts of the Trust Territory. Under this relationship the future Government of Micronesia would have full responsibility for and authority over internal affairs of Micronesia. The US would have full responsibility for and authority over foreign affairs and over defense matters in Micronesia. (UNCLASSIFIED)

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