

Ambassador Williams:

LAND IS MAJOR ITEM FOR MARIANAS TALKS

SAIPAN, May 15 (MNS)---
The head of America's negotiating team is optimistic about the round of talks on the future political status of the Northern Marianas which began Wednesday (May 15) on Saipan.

Ambassador F. Hayden Williams said this week that the question of land will be the major item on the agenda, adding: "When we finish with the land issue, we will have gone through most if not all of the major items in the negotiations." The Ambassador said he is hopeful that a draft "covenant" of commonwealth for the Mariana Islands District will come out of the current round of talks, expected

to last through the end of May.

The talks began with a working session Wednesday morning at the Continental Hotel. The usual opening plenary session that has marked the start of previous rounds of negotiations was not held this time, both sides agreeing instead to get right to work on the issues facing them.

"Land is certainly going to be a major item," Williams told MNS during a lengthy interview Tuesday afternoon. "We will be resuming where we left off in discussing arrangements for satisfying United States land requirements in the Marianas. We will

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be taking up eminent domain, the question of land alienation, the return of public lands and just generally this whole subject of land...We hope that out of these discussions will come commitments regarding U.S. land requirements," the Ambassador said.

Williams made it clear that the United States intends to return to the public domain all lands for which there is no immediate need, including those presently included in the category of so-called "military retention" lands. He said the American requirement for land on Tinian remains as publicly described last year, when it was said that the U.S. hopes to acquire roughly two-thirds of the island for a major military installation.

Asked about recent moves on Tinian to retain a law

talks...

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firm and prepare a position paper on behalf of the people of Tinian who oppose the U.S. land requirements there, Ambassador Williams said: "The United States will continue to negotiate with the duly-appointed Marianas Political Status Commission, which includes two members from Tinian. I would think that any group in the Marianas concerned with the talks would make their voices heard through their members on the status commission."

The Ambassador added that in his view the Marianas Commission has done an excellent job of preparing for these negotiations. "I really do think that the Marianas Commission has worked very hard," he stated. "The level of their participation and the seriousness with which they approach their task have been quite

impressive."

Turning to the question of the negotiations between the U.S. and the Joint Committee on Future Status of the Congress of Micronesia, Ambassador Williams said he and his deputy, James Wilson, will meet on Saipan in mid-June with Senator Lazarus Salif and Representative Ekpap Silk, Chairman and co-chairman of the joint committee, for another in a series of informal discussions on the issues still confronting the two sides in those talks. But he said there will not be another formal round of negotiations until at least late this summer or early in the fall.

"We still feel that there are some items better approached by informal, rather than formal meetings," he said. "Hopefully this June meeting will pave the way for another formal round of talks later in the year."

The separatist movement in the Marshall Islands is being watched closely by Ambassador Williams and other members of the U.S. delegation, the Ambassador said in response to another question. But he pointed out that no one from the Marshalls has contacted him regarding separate status talks, either formally or inform-

ally, and he emphasized that the U.S. position toward the Marshalls remains unchanged.

"It continues to be our hope," Williams said, "that we will have a single solution for the Marshalls and the Carolines, and that they will form a united Micronesia. We hope that the upcoming Micronesian Constitutional Convention will go a long way toward resolving the kinds of questions being raised in the Marshalls. These are essentially internal questions, and we feel that the constitutional convention is the right kind of forum for discussing them."

The Ambassador said that despite the resolution of the Nitijela opposing Marshallese participation in the convention, he is hopeful that the district will be represented. "I do hope that the people in the Marshalls and their leaders will participate in the constitutional convention," he said. "They can do so with the full knowledge that no constitution is going to be imposed upon them against their will."

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