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STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

On June 17, 1975, the people of the Mariana Islands District freely exercised their right of self-determination in a United Nations observed plebiscite and chose by an overwhelming margin to approve the "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas in Political Union with the United States of America". The Department of the Interior again sends its warmest greetings to the people of the Marianas and I am pleased to inform them that President Ford has just submitted the Covenant to the United States Congress with his strong endorsement. Indications we have received point toward speedy consideration of and action on the Covenant by the U.S. Congress.

Final Congressional action could come as early as this summer. Therefore, there is a pressing need for further, immediate and more detailed contingency planning for the full separation of the Marianas District from the remainder of the Trust Territory and for the beginning of its transition to a new Commonwealth political status. I regret that the schedule envisaged earlier, namely that full separate administration of the Marianas would occur upon acceptance of the Covenant in the political status plebiscite, now must be adjusted to provide opportunity for necessary detailed planning for separate administration and transition while the Covenant is under consideration by the Congress. I am therefore withholding the issuance of a Secretarial Order providing for full administrative separation pending Congressional consideration of the Covenant. During

this time the detailed planning process in consultation with the local leadership can be completed.

In order that the final planning process leading to a new political status for the Marianas can be started right away, I have requested the High Commissioner to reconvene the Ad Hoc Committee on Administration Contingency Planning for the Marianas Separation. Further, while my new Director of Territorial Affairs, Mr. Fred M. Zeder, is in the Marianas during the first few days of July, I have asked him to meet with the Ad Hoc Committee to discuss further work. He will be requesting that the Committee, which is chaired by Deputy High Commissioner Coleman, consult fully and meet as often as necessary with the Marianas District Legislature and the Marianas Political Status Commission, both of which are represented on the Committee. Mr. Zeder will also call upon experts in the Trust Territory and Marianas District governments to provide their support and services to the Ad Hoc Committee on a priority basis. Additionally the Committee will consult as appropriate with other interested persons and organizations including the Congress of Micronesia and will be able to consider their legitimate concerns. During the course of the planning period, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee will report periodically to Mr. Zeder in Washington.

The Ad Hoc Committee will use its preliminary report which was filed last May 15 as a basis for its further work and consultations. It will have as its principal responsibility planning for the organization of a separately administered government of the Marianas District to come into being upon the approval of

the Covenant by the United States Congress. Mr. Zeder will provide the Committee with the comments and revisions made on its preliminary report by the Office of Territorial Affairs.

The Committee's final report to the Department of the Interior should cover:

- the government of the Marianas District under separate administration and during Phase I Transition, which is the time between the beginning of separate administration and the installation of the Marianas' own elected government under a new Constitution;

- relations between the Marianas and the Trust Territory Headquarters and the Congress of Micronesia and the other districts during separate administration until termination of the Trusteeship Agreement; and

- the applicability to the Marianas of the Trust Territory Code and further work on the sharing of government services between the Marianas and Headquarters governments.

In addition to these matters, the Committee will consider but will not be limited to such other subjects as:

- the impact on the Marianas of a future relocation of the Trust Territory Headquarters.

- implementation of Phase I Transition as approved by the Joint U.S.-Marianas Committee on Transition;

- a timetable for various stages in separate administration relevant to relations with the TTPI Government, including the Congress of Micronesia;

- provisions for the continued employment of those Marianas citizens presently working for the Trust Territory government who wish to remain there; and

- the early implementation of a special fund provided for in the Covenant for education and training of Marianas citizens to enable them to meet the expanded employment opportunities which will become available during Phase I Transition and under the new Commonwealth government.

During the time the Covenant is under consideration by the United States Congress the administration of the Northern Mariana Islands will remain unchanged. The Headquarters of the Trust Territory Government will remain on Saipan Island. There are no intentions to relocate the headquarters or to reduce employment levels in the headquarters staff in the near future or even after separation becomes effective. At such time as the Covenant is approved by the Congress, separate administration will commence, a United States Resident Commissioner for the Marianas will be appointed, and the Marianas Delegation to the Congress of Micronesia will leave that body and join the Marianas District Legislature as members-at-large. Also at that time, the agreed Phase I Transition program for the Marianas will begin and the \$1.5 million already appropriated by the United States Congress will be made available for the establishment and functioning of the Office of Transitional Planning and Studies and for other transition related activities.

Clearly, the next few weeks will be important ones for the

Marianas District Legislature. I have asked Mr. Zeder to request a meeting with the leadership of the Legislature and to bring to their attention several vital issues which seem to require that body's thoughtful consideration and action. Among these are a detailed review of the Trust Territory Code to determine where amending provisions are necessary when a full separate administration occurs. The Legislature will also of course need to reorganize its committee and staff structure to accommodate new members-at-large and its greatly expanded responsibilities in the areas of budget and finance. As soon as the Legislature creates a legal entity according to the provisions of Secretarial Order No. 2969, title to public lands in the Marianas District can begin to be transferred to the corporation (full name). The Legislature may wish also to plan for legislation calling a Marianas Constitutional Convention and referendum and to establish procedures for its coordination with the Office of Transitional Planning and Studies and the Joint Transition Commission, both of which were provided for in the agreed Phase I Transition plan.

The actions I have outlined should help us in the further planning necessary for full separate administration and the beginning of Phase I Transition. Upon approval of the Covenant by the U.S. Congress, I will issue a new Secretarial Order providing for the separate administration of the Marianas District. The Order, along with the internal organization of the interim separate administration government, will be based

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in large part on the final report of the Ad Hoc Committee.

I should like to thank the Ad Hoc Committee for its excellent preliminary report, and I will deeply appreciate the continuing best efforts of the Marianas leadership and the Trust Territory and the Marianas District governments as we move together to make final plans.

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