

FACT SHEET
THE NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH COVENANT

The Marianas Covenant is before the Senate as H.J.Res. 549, as amended. It was approved without dissent by the Senate Interior Committee on October 3. The Senate Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations held hearings in November and are scheduled to return the legislation to the floor by January 27, 1976. The Covenant passed the House of Representatives without dissent in July.

Background: The Northern Marianas include 14 islands with a total land area of 183.5 square miles. They extend northward 338 miles from the American Territory of Guam and have a population of 14,000. The islands have been administered by the U.S. since WW II under a U.N. Strategic Trusteeship.

U.S. Obligation and Political Aspirations of the People: The U.S. is obligated under Article 6 of the Trusteeship Agreement to develop the peoples of the Territory toward self-government or independence and to recognize the freely expressed will of the people in an act of self-determination. The people of the Northern Marianas, for more than twenty-five years, have expressed their desire to enter into a permanent political relationship with the U.S.

The Negotiations and Covenant Highlights: The Covenant is the result of 2 1/2 years of negotiations, undertaken in full and continuous consultation with those Committees of the U.S. Congress which have legislative responsibility over U.S. territories. Under the Covenant, the U.S. will have sovereignty. The Marianas will have local self-government, U.S. citizenship, and the protections of the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights. Financial assistance of \$14,000,000 per year for seven years will be provided by the Federal Government. The Marianas will also be eligible for federal programs and services. U.S. current and future defense needs are met by the land arrangements of the Covenant.

Self-determination and the Northern Marianas Plebiscite: The Covenant was approved by the people of the Marianas District in a free act of self-determination. In a U.N. observed plebiscite, on June 17, 1975, 95% of the registered voters cast their ballots and a 78.8% majority voted for Commonwealth.

Next Steps Leading to Establishment of Commonwealth: Following approval by the Senate, those provisions of the Covenant which relate to local self-government and are compatible with the Trusteeship Agreement will be implemented. Full Commonwealth status, including the extension of U.S. citizenship and sovereignty will not come into effect until the Trusteeship is terminated. In the interim, if approved by the Senate, the Marianas will be administered apart from the other districts and will begin implementing steps toward self-government under their own constitution.

Negotiations with Other Islands in TTPI: The United States negotiator for Micronesian status talks has agreed to meet with the co-chairmen of the Congress of Micronesia's Joint Committee on Future Status in January for a tentative review of developments which have occurred since ad referendum agreement was reached on a Compact of Free Association in October 1974.

Final Termination of Trusteeship: U.S. will continue to work with the U.N., keeping it fully informed and seeking its advice on ending the Trusteeship. When all the districts are ready, hopefully in the 1980/81 timeframe, the U.S. will take up the matter of termination with the U.N. Trusteeship Council and the Security Council. It is the intention of the U.S. to seek the agreement of the U.N. Security Council on termination of the U.S. Trusteeship over the TTPI.