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STATEMENT OF SENATOR PEDRO A. TENORIO BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

November 5, 1975

Mr. Chairman, I am Pedro A. Tenorio, a Senator in the Congress of Micronesia representing the Mariana Islands. I am a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission as well. With me today are Congressman Daniel Muna, a member of the Marianas District Legislature, and of the Commission, and Mr. Manuel A. Sablan, who is also a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission. We are accompanied by Mr. Howard Willens, counsel to the Commission. We are honored to present this statement on behalf of the people of the Mariana Islands.

For more than twenty years our people have expressed their desire to become American citizens and to become part of the American political system. The United Nations Trusteeship Council and the United Nations Visiting Missions have repeatedly recognized the sincerity and the depth of this desire. Until 1972, we in the Marianas worked with the other Districts in an attempt to develop a single future political status arrangement satisfactory to all of the peoples of the Trust Territory, despite our differences. In that year, however, it became clear that the representatives of the other

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Districts of Micronesia would insist on a relationship with the United States that did not involve American citizenship and that would be unilaterally terminable by either side. This position reflected the fundamental political differences between the Marianas and the rest of Micronesia. The people of the Marianas, recognizing such irreconcilable political differences with the rest of Micronesia, had no choice but to repeat their prior requests for separate political status negotiations with the United States aimed to establishing a close and permanent political relationship. The United States finally agreed.

Those negotiations began in earnest in 1973, and led eventually to the signing of the Covenant earlier this year. The Covenant was immediately and unanimously approved by the Mariana Islands District Legislature. Then, after a full and unhampered political debate in the Marianas, the Covenant was endorsed by a seventy-nine percent affirmative vote in the plebiscite. By this sovereign act of self-determination, the people of the Marianas have selected their future political status. It remains only for the United States -- for this distinguished body -- to ratify our act.

We recognize that our choice of a future political status different from that of the other parts of the Trust Territory has raised some questions. But for those who

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know the historical, political, cultural and social differences in the Trust Territory, our desires are not difficult to understand. Geographically, ethnically, linguistically, and economically, the strongest ties our people have are to Guam, long an American territory, not to the other parts of the Trust Territory. Indeed, at the very beginning of the Trusteeship, the United States and the United Nations recognized that the Trust Territory consisted of a variety of "peoples" and not a single "people" in any meaningful sense. The Trusteeship Agreement itself recognized this, for it obligates the United States to

"promote the development of the inhabitants of the Trust Territory towards self-government or independence, as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of the Trust Territory and its peoples and the freely-expressed wishes of the peoples concerned."

As one of the peoples of the Trust Territory, we, the people of the Marianas, have, in the words of the United Nations,

". . . the right to self-determination; and by virtue of that right [we have the right] freely [to] determine [our] political status and freely to pursue [our] economic, social and cultural development."

In the plebiscite the people of the Marianas clearly demonstrated that for us the most appropriate future political status is self-government as part of the American

political family in accordance with the Covenant. To ignore the results of the plebiscite would be to deny the people of the Marianas our right of self-determination.

There is no dispute about these points in the Trust Territory. The Congress of Micronesia has recognized and supported the desires of the people of the Marianas to exercise our own right of self-determination. My colleagues in the Congress of Micronesia who are here today will testify in support of the desire of the people of the Marianas to become members of the American Political family. They fully respect and accept the result of our plebiscite in which our people overwhelmingly voted in favor of the Covenant. The leaders of the Congress of Micronesia have had some concerns about the mechanical aspects of the separation, but these are largely internal and relatively technical problems that do not call into question the Congress' support for the Covenant as embodying the wishes of the Marianas people.

The people of the Marianas, as well as the people of the rest of Micronesia, recognize that some temporary internal administrative problems may develop as a result of the political separation between us. To this end, we are committed to resolve our problems together as friends, and in the spirit of cooperation that we as Micronesians know best. We are appearing together today with

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our Micronesian brothers not as adversaries but as mutual friends to convey to this distinguished body that we as peoples of that part of the "Pacific" believe in the perpetuation of peace, friendship and cooperation among ourselves. As we are doing now, under the new Marianas political status we will continue to jointly participate economically, socially, culturally and educationally toward developing understandings that are of mutual concern and for the well-being of all our people.

We are grateful for the understanding of our friends in the Congress of Micronesia, and we offer them our support and good wishes for whatever political status they choose in the exercise of their right of self-determination.

Mr. Chairman, in our view there can be no doubt about the propriety, as a legal and indeed as a moral matter, of approving the relationship embodied in the Covenant. The political unity of Micronesia might be a desirable goal in the abstract, but it has no practical basis. The political, economic and social differences between the Marianas and the other Districts in Micronesia are too profound to permit a unified political system to exist after termination of the Trusteeship. Termination of a Trusteeship by a division into parts in accordance

with the wishes of its different peoples is not only prece-
dented -- the British Cameroons is one example -- but is
also required where, as here, to do so is necessary to
respect one people's right of self-determination.

There can be no question that the degree of
self-government called for by the Covenant satisfies the
obligations of the Trusteeship Agreement and the Charter.
The relationship is not colonial. We will have entire
self-government with respect to our internal affairs, and
we will be able to make our views known about matters of
foreign affairs that affect us. This meets all the
requirements imposed by the Trusteeship Agreement and the
Charter.

For over 400 years, Mr. Chairman, we in the
Marianas have, without our consent, been governed by
foreigners. We have decided ourselves and without any
undue influence that we wish to become American citizens
and to enjoy the rights and to assume the responsibilities
of being members of the American political family. We
made that decision in the most democratic and open
plebiscite ever conducted in Micronesia. If we were
forced into a common political status with the other
Districts of Micronesia, we would be denied our
inalienable right of self-determination. I am sure that

this great country, which we truly love, will respect this fundamental right. On behalf of all the people of the Marianas, we urge this Committee to recommend prompt approval of the Covenant by the Senate.

Thank you.