

Written Statement of Deputy Secretary of State
Robert S. Ingersoll for Senate Foreign Relations
Committee Hearings on Marianas Covenant,
November 5, 1975

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The Department of State fully supports H.J.R. 549, a Joint Resolution to approve the "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America" and recommends that the Congress grant its approval at the earliest possible time.

The Northern Mariana Islands and the United States Territory of Guam, which has been a part of the United States since 1898, form the geographic entity in the Western Pacific known as the Mariana Islands. The Northern Mariana Islands are comprised of 16 islands, 6 of which are inhabited. They have a population currently estimated at 14,500 which are located for the most part on the islands of Saipan, Tinian and Rota. The great majority of the population are Chamorros who share the same culture and the same language with the American citizens of Guam.

Since World War II the Northern Mariana Islands have been administered by the United States--since 1947 as part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands under a Trusteeship Agreement between the Security Council of the United Nations and the United States. In that Agreement the United States and the United Nations agreed to place under the trusteeship system established in the Charter of the United Nations the Northern Mariana Islands and the other islands north of the equator in the Pacific which had been held by Japan prior to the Second World War under a League of Nations mandate. The Agreement designated the Trust Territory

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of the Pacific Islands as a strategic trust and placed the Trust Territory under the aegis of the Security Council of the United Nations in accordance with Articles 82 and 83 of the Charter of the United Nations.. Article 82 reads:

"There may be designated, in any trusteeship agreement, a strategic area or areas which may include part or all of the trust territory to which the agreement applies, without prejudice to any special agreement or agreements made under Article 43."

Article 83 reads:

1. All functions of the United Nations relating to strategic areas, including the approval of the terms of the trusteeship agreements and of their alteration or amendment, shall be exercised by the Security Council.
2. The basic objectives set forth in Article 76 shall be applicable to the people of each strategic area.
3. The Security Council shall, subject to the provisions of the trusteeship agreements and without prejudice to security considerations, avail itself of the assistance of the Trusteeship Council to perform those functions of the United Nations under the trusteeship system relating to political, economic, social, and educational matters in the strategic area."

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands is the only trust territory that has been designated a strategic area and placed under the Security Council. All of the other territories placed under the UN trusteeship system were placed under the aegis of the United Nations General Assembly, through trusteeship agreements concluded between the UN General Assembly and the Administering Authority of the territory concerned.

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands is the only remaining trust territory of the eleven territories which were placed under the UN trusteeship system. All of the other trusteeships have been concluded, following an act of self-determination in accordance with the provisions of the UN Charter, which provides in Article 76 that the basic objective of the UN trusteeship system shall be, among other things, to:

- "b. to promote the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the trust territories, and their progressive development toward self-government or independence as may be appropriate to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned, and as may be provided by the terms of each trusteeship agreement."

Eight of the former trust territories achieved the status of independence. British Togoland voted to become part of an independent Ghana. The Northern British Cameroons elected to become a part of Nigeria while the Southern Cameroons chose to join the newly independent French Cameroons.

As the Administering Authority of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the United States has an obligation as provided in Article 6 of the Trusteeship Agreement to "promote the development of the inhabitants of the trust territory toward 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."

The people of the Northern Mariana Islands have expressed their wishes for a close political affiliation with the United States for more than twenty-five years. When the first UN Visiting Mission went to the Trust Territory in 1950, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands informed the Mission of their desire to become an American territory and to become American citizens. Since that time, in the words of the UN Visiting Mission which went to the Trust Territory in 1973, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands have "constantly indicated that they wished to maintain a close relationship with the United States." The Visiting Mission's report records polls and referenda supporting annexation of the islands by the United States or unification with Guam held in 1961, 1964, 1967, 1968 and 1969.

In accordance with Article 83 of the Charter of the United Nations and resolutions adopted by the Security Council and the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations, the Trusteeship Council has carried out on behalf of the Security Council those functions of the United Nations relating to the political, economic, social and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the Trust

Territory of the Pacific Islands of which the Northern Marianas are a part. The United States is a member of the Trusteeship Council and submits annual reports on the administration of the Trust Territory to the Trusteeship Council, which in turn submits annual reports on the Trust Territory to the Security Council. To date the Security Council has not taken any action with respect to the Trust Territory beyond noting the receipt of the Trusteeship Council's annual reports.

The Trusteeship Council currently has five members: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. The People's Republic of China, however, has not taken its seat on the Council. Australia was a member of the Trusteeship Council until September 16, 1975 when it relinquished its seat upon the attainment of independence of the Australian-administered Trust Territory of Papua New Guinea.

The Trusteeship Council has been on record as expressing the hope that the peoples of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands would find it possible to remain in unity following termination of the trusteeship. The Council has also recognized, however, the repeated requests of the Northern Marianas for a status separate from the rest of Micronesia and in closer union with the United States than the more distant and less permanent relationship contemplated by representatives of the other districts of the Trust Territory.

The United States had for many years supported the principle that the peoples of the Trust Territory should remain in unity following termination of the trusteeship. In 1969 the United

States entered into negotiations with the Joint Committee on Future Status of the Congress of Micronesia, comprised of representatives of all the districts of the Trust Territory including the Northern Marianas, with a view to reaching agreement on a future political status for the Trust Territory as a whole. This did not prove possible. In August 1970 the Congress of Micronesia rejected a U.S. offer of Commonwealth status and has since sought a different and less close relationship with the United States than that sought by the Northern Mariana Islands. When it became clear that it would not be possible to negotiate an agreement on a future political status that would be acceptable to all the peoples of the Trust Territory, the United States agreed to the request of the representatives of the Mariana Islands District that the United States enter into separate negotiations with the representatives of the Northern Mariana Islands looking towards a close and permanent union with the United States.

Negotiations with the Marianas Political Status Commission, which was established by the Marianas District Legislature to conduct the negotiations on its behalf, began in December 1972 and concluded on February 15, 1975 with the signing of the Covenant which is now before the Congress for its consideration and approval.

Following the signing of the Covenant and its approval by the Mariana Islands District Legislature, the Secretary of the Interior with the concurrence of the Secretary of State issued a Proclamation on April 10, 1975 calling for a plebiscite

to be held on June 17, 1975 to provide an opportunity for the people of the Northern Mariana Islands to decide, pursuant to their right of self-determination, whether they wished to become a Commonwealth of the United States in accordance with the terms of the Covenant. The President designated Mr. Erwin D. Canham, Editor Emeritus of the Christian Science Monitor, to serve as Plebiscite Commissioner with the responsibility of ensuring that the plebiscite was held in a fair and impartial manner.

At its annual session held May 27 - June 6 of this year, the Trusteeship Council, at the invitation of the United States, authorized and despatched a Special Visiting Mission to observe the plebiscite including the campaign and polling arrangements, the casting of votes and the counting of ballots.

Ninety-five percent of the registered voters of the Northern Mariana Islands participated in the plebiscite held on June 17, of whom 78.8% expressed their approval of Commonwealth status as set forth in the Commonwealth Covenant.

The Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands was established by the Trusteeship Agreement and will remain in existence until such time as the Trusteeship Agreement is terminated. We have informed the Trusteeship Council that it is the intention of the United States to have the Trusteeship Agreement terminated simultaneously for all areas of the Trust Territory. The Northern Mariana Islands would therefore remain a part of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands until the Trusteeship Agreement has been terminated. In this connection, however, the Mariana

Islands District of the Trust Territory was administered by the United States separately from the other districts of the Trust Territory from 1952 to 1962. If the Congress approves the Commonwealth Covenant, the Mariana Islands District will again be placed under a separate administration pursuant to existing authority which the United States has under the Trusteeship Agreement.

We have assured the Trusteeship Council that the United States is doing all within its power to see that negotiations on the future political status of the other districts of the Trust Territory progress rapidly to a successful conclusion in order that the Trusteeship can be terminated for all the districts of the Trust Territory by 1980 or 1981. In the meantime the United States will continue to keep the Trusteeship Council fully informed of developments. At the appropriate time we intend to take up the matter of termination of the Trusteeship with the Trusteeship Council and the Security Council.

While the Northern Mariana Islands would not become a Commonwealth under U.S. sovereignty until the trusteeship has been terminated, those provisions of the Covenant which are consistent with the Trusteeship Agreement will be put into effect in stages following approval of the Covenant by the United States Congress. These provisions generally provide for the self-government of the Northern Marianas and would be a major step in the fulfillment of the United States obligation under the Trusteeship Agreement to promote the development of the inhabitants towards self-government.

The granting of Commonwealth status to the Northern Mariana Islands would be fully consistent with the national interests and the foreign policy of the United States. The United States has been responsible for the security of the adjacent United States Territory of Guam since 1898 and is currently responsible under the Trusteeship Agreement for the defence of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, including the Northern Mariana Islands.

Implementation of the Covenant and the eventual establishment of a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands would have no direct effect on security arrangements in that part of the world. The Covenant includes provisions for the lease of land for the construction of military facilities if future circumstances should require. These leasing arrangements would strengthen the capability of the United States to maintain peace and security in the area of Guam and the Pacific region as a whole in the years ahead. However, we regard possible military facilities in the Northern Mariana Islands as an important complement to, not as a substitute for existing defense arrangements in the East Asia and Pacific area. At the same time, we believe that our allies and friends in the Pacific welcome the prospect of the Northern Mariana Islands becoming a part of the United States as an element of stability in that part of the world and as an indication of the intention of the United States to continue to maintain a major presence and play a major role in the Pacific in the years to come.

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