

STATEMENT OF SENATOR PEDRO H. TENORIO
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ARMED
SERVICES

November 17, 1975

Mr. Chairman, I am Pedro H. Tenorio, a Senator in the Congress of Micronesia representing the Marianas Islands, and a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission. With me today are Congressmen Daniel Muna, a member of the Marianas District Legislature and the Commission, and Mr. Manuel A. Sablan, who is also a member of the Marianas Political Status Commission. We are accompanied by Mr. Howard P. Willens, counsel to the Commission. We are honored to present this statement on behalf of the people of the Marianas Islands, who overwhelmingly voted their support for the Covenant in the United Nations-observed plebiscite last June.

Perhaps no matter was discussed at greater length during the negotiations that led to the Covenant than the question of the land that was to be made available to the United States for national security purposes in the Marianas. As representatives of the people of the Marianas, we insisted that our people be given a clear indication of the extent of United States land needs in the Marianas before exercising their inalienable right of self-determination by voting on the Covenant.

During the political debate on the Covenant that preceded the plebiscite, the question of the amount of land that could be made available to the United States was one of the primary issues discussed. By endorsing the Covenant overwhelmingly, the people of the Marianas demonstrated their willingness to permit a substantial portion of our scant islands to be used by the United States, if necessary, to maintain peace and security in the Western Pacific. Even on Tinian where somewhat more than half of the entire land area of the Island might be made available to the United States military, a majority of the voters supported the Covenant. Thus, all of the people of the Marianas recognized that along with the rights of the United States citizenship comes certain responsibilities -- responsibilities that we are prepared to fulfill as patriotic and dedicated American citizens.

Under the Covenant and the Technical Agreement that accompanies it, the United States will have the right to a 100-year lease on land in the Marianas to be used for military purposes. If the United States does not exercise its right to obtain this lease within five years after the approval of the Covenant, then its right lapses, and the United States would have to utilize its power of eminent domain under the Covenant to obtain land if it later became necessary to do so. In other words, the Covenant contains no commitment whatsoever on the part of the United States either to lease the land or to build a military base on it. Indeed, we have been advised by legal counsel that the

land could not be acquired by the United States nor could any base be built without further authorizations and appropriations by the Congress.

It is entirely up to you, Mr. Chairman, and this distinguished body as a whole to determine whether the national defense interests of the United States require the building of a base in the Marianas. And this is not a decision which you have to make now, but is one which you can make in the future. By approving the Covenant now, the United States will be assured of its right to obtain land at a fixed price in the Marianas during the next five years. Whether the United States ever exercises this right, of course, will depend on your future judgment whether the land should be acquired, perhaps only on a contingency basis, in the interests of national security.

Mr. Chairman, we do not come to this Committee to urge the United States either to build a base in the Marianas or not to do so. We are not experts on the question of the strategic importance of the Marianas to the United States. We have been told that there is a national defense interest in the Marianas for a variety of reasons, including its proximity to Guam, the desirability of denying the Marianas to any foreign power, the possibility that a base will be needed in the Marianas, and the advantages of the Marianas as a training or storage location. These are matters for you to decide. Our approval of the Covenant shows that the people of the Marianas are willing to make part of our land available for these purposes if necessary.

We urge the members of this Committee to recognize that approval of the Covenant protects whatever strategic interest the United States has now or may have in the future with respect to the Marianas, without committing the United States in any way to build a military base. But more important to us is the fact that approval of the Covenant provides the basis for a prompt and honorable termination of the entire Trusteeship Agreement with respect to all of Micronesia in a manner that respects the rights of self-determination of the people of the Marianas. In our opinion, the political aspects of the Covenant can and should be considered separately from its military aspects. We urge those members of the Senate who may oppose the Covenant because of its military aspects to reexamine the issue -- and give the people of the Marianas a fair hearing on the merits of this proposed political settlement that goes to the very heart of this nation's obligations under the Trusteeship Agreement.

It has sometimes been charged that approval of the Covenant will extend the United States defense commitments. That charge is simply not supportable. The United States presently has responsibility for the defense of the Marianas and the rest of Micronesia; if the Trusteeship cannot be concluded in a satisfactory way, those responsibilities will continue indefinitely. Moreover, the United States has defense responsibility, as well as a major defense facility, on the

Island of Guam. Guam, which has been an American territory for all of this century, and whose citizens are American citizens, is geographically part of the Marianas island chain. U.S. responsibility for Guam will continue regardless of the action the Congress takes on the Covenant.

It has been suggested recently, Mr. Chairman, that the Senate should take no action on the Covenant at this time. We believe that the delay would serve no useful purpose and might, in fact, adversely affect the interests of both the United States and the Marianas. Certainly there is no reason relating to the military aspects of the Covenant that warrants delay, since the Covenant contains no commitments on the part of the United States with respect to military activity in the Marianas but simply preserves United States' options in this regard. From our point of view, there are many reasons that we would oppose delay.

First, delay would deny to the people in the Marianas increased self-government. Under the Covenant, the people of the Marianas will be able for the first time to draft and approve a constitution creating democratic governmental institutions. This will be lost if congressional action is delayed.

Second, deferral of action on the Covenant will serve no useful purpose. There is absolutely no possibility that the people of the Marianas will ever voluntarily agree to join in a common political status with the other five districts of Micronesia. Our differences are far too great, and delay cannot change this fundamental political fact.

Third, all of the information that is needed to make a sound judgment on the Covenant is before the Congress now. In this connection, we want to bring to the attention of this Committee a letter submitted to the Foreign Relations Committee by representatives of the Congress of Micronesia and of the Marianas concerning the status of our discussions regarding technical aspects of the separation of the Marianas. That letter (attached to this statement) notes that agreement in principle has been reached on virtually all of the issues raised, and that neither the Congress of Micronesia nor the Marianas representatives believe that the few remaining issues "pose any problem that would warrant delay of congressional action of the Covenant." That letter also notes that the representatives of the Marianas urge prompt and favorable action on the Covenant and that the representatives of the Congress of Micronesia "interpose no objection to such action." Thus, all of us in Micronesia are agreed that the Covenant should be approved.

There are two other reasons we oppose delay and think that it would not be in our interest or in the interest of the United States. One is that delay would threaten to extend the Trusteeship Agreement into the indefinite future, which is plainly inconsistent with our mutual interest in bringing the trusteeship to a prompt and honorable conclusion. Congressional approval of the Covenant at this time would provide concrete evidence of the willingness of the United States to terminate the Trusteeship Agreement as soon as the peoples of Micronesia have expressed their desire with respect to their political future.

15202

Failure to approve the Covenant is certain to be taken as an indication that the United States may not terminate this Trusteeship on the timetable currently contemplated. And delay would call into question the willingness of the United States Congress ever to approve the Covenant. If this forced the people of the Marianas to begin to explore other, and in their view less desirable, political status alternatives, then no one can say how long termination might have to be delayed.

Moreover, inaction of the Covenant and consequent delay of separate administration for the Marianas would expose the people of the Marianas to the possibility of serious discrimination in the Congress of Micronesia. In view of the determination of the Marianas to pursue a separate political status it would be naive to expect that the other five districts -- despite their support for the Covenant -- would be truly concerned during the period of delay with treating the Marianas on a fair and nondiscriminatory basis.

Finally, rejection of the Covenant, whether in the guise of deferral or not, would deny the people of the Marianas the basic rights of self-determination. Once the United States undertook the responsibilities of an Administering Authority under the United Nations Trusteeship Agreement, it undertook obligations to the people of Micronesia different from those which it has for any other people outside the United States.

The theoretical discussions of international law advanced by opponents of the Covenant cannot obscure two basic facts:

(1) Previous trusteeships have been terminated by dividing the dependent territory into separate political entities, so it would not be unprecedented if Micronesia were not to remain a single political entity after termination; and

(2) Rejection of the Covenant would amount to forcing the people of the Marianas into a political arrangement with the other five districts contrary to the expressed wishes of all of the people of Micronesia.

Thus, opponents of the Covenant seem to be saying that the peoples of Micronesia -- both those of the Marianas and those of the other five districts -- should be forced into a common political status whether they like it or not. We do not think that the Senate should or will accept this proposition, for it would deny us the basic human rights that this country has long defended.

For over 400 years, Mr. Chairman, we in the Marianas have been governed by foreigners without our consent. For the first time we have had the opportunity to decide on our own future government. The result is the Covenant now before you for approval. It was approved in the most democratic and open plebiscite ever conducted in Micronesia. On behalf of all of the people of the Marianas, we urge this Committee to recommend that the Senate give its prompt approval to the Covenant.

Thank you.

15204