

REPORT OF DELEGATE BENJAMIN T. MANGLONA,
CHAIRMAN OF ROTA PUBLIC HEARINGS, TO THE
NORTHERN MARIANAS CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION
NOVEMBER 20, 1976

Mr. President:

On behalf of the delegation that conducted public hearings on Rota this week, I am pleased to report to the Convention. The delegation consisted of Delegates Felipe Q. Atalig, Manuel A. Tenorio, Herman Q. Guerrero, Joaquin S. Torres, Luis A. Benavente, Esteven M. King, Pedro Q. Dela Cruz, Gregorio S. Calvo, and Prudencio T. Manglona. I served as the chairman of the delegation and presided over the hearings.

Our hearings convened at 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 17, 1976. The chairman opened the meeting with an explanation of the political history of the Northern Mariana Islands. The chairman also discussed the remaining steps necessary for the achievement of full Commonwealth status. Members of the delegation discussed fully articles II, III, IV, VI, XI, X, XVIII, XII, XV, and XIII, of the draft Constitution. We adjourned at 11:00 p.m.

The hearings resumed the next morning at 8:30. At that time, the delegation invited questions and comments from the people. Concerns were expressed with respect to five major areas. First, some of those who testified believed that article II, section 3 should be amended so as to require members of the house of representatives to be older than 21 years. Advocates of this position argued that few persons who are only 21 years old are sufficiently mature or experienced to

serve as a representative. On the other hand, one speaker expressed satisfaction with the age requirement for representatives.

Second, some Rotanese felt that the Constitution ought not to include provisions restricting the alienation of land. These individuals argued that the language of the Covenant is sufficient protection for the interests of the Marianas people if that language is implemented by the legislature.

Third, the delegation heard statements voicing concern over article XI, section 5(a). That provision prevents a homesteader from obtaining title to his land for five years after receiving the grant of the homestead. Some witnesses asserted that this period of time is too long. Others voiced dismay that the homestead problem might not be resolved prior to the establishment of constitutional government.

Fourth, several speakers disagreed with the compromise concerning local government adopted in principle by the Convention. In particular, these people felt that section 18 of article III should be amended to require, rather than merely permit, the governor to assign a mayor the responsibility for providing Commonwealth services to his constituents. Some speakers also felt that the power received by the mayor under the draft Constitution is insufficient to ensure that the people of Rota will receive adequate service.

Fifth, one witness was disappointed that Rota's representation in the lower house will be less than Saipan's. The delegation responded that the principle of one man-one vote demanded this disparity.

Yesterday's hearing concluded with explanations of articles IX, XVI, XIV, I, V, VII, VIII and XVII, and of the schedule of transitional matters by members of the delegation and with further questions from the people. The delegation was gratified by the substantial interest in the Constitution displayed by the approximately 100 people of Rota who attended the hearings. We are convinced that what we learned will be of great benefit to the Convention as it completes its work.

Thank you, Mr. President.