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Office of the Mayor
Northern Islands
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
P.O. Box 2859, Saipan, MP 96950
Telephone: 234-7392

JOSEPH T. OGUMORO
Mayor of Northern Islands

July 14, 1995

Hon. Felix R. Nogis
Chairman, Committee on Executive
Branch and Local Government
Third Northern Mariana Islands
Constitutional Convention
Caller Box 10007
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Chairman Nogis:

Warm greetings to you and other honorable delegates of your Committee!

I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before this honorable committee to share my experience and to recommend ways to improve our Constitution which will hopefully translate to better services to the people we serve.

I have already submitted my proposed Constitutional Amendments to the Convention and these proposals, totalling about 15, have been identified as delegate proposals Numbers 376 through 388 and Numbers 391 through 392.

Time is of the essence as the Convention must deliberate on many proposals within a very limited time span. Therefore, to avoid repeating my entire proposals which are already before you, I will limit my discussions this morning to the issue of empowering local government and the need to explore the socio-economic potential of our northern frontier.

As you review and deliberate on the many proposed Constitutional amendments presently before you, I urged you to examine two basic but fundamental questions critical to the CNMI. These questions include the following:

1. **What type of services are necessary and needed by the people of Tinian, Rota, Saipan, and the islands north of Saipan?** Once identified, these services should then be prioritized in the order of their urgency and importance; and,

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2. **How can these services be delivered best and quickest to the people of Tinian, Rota, Saipan, and the islands north of Saipan?** Once these have been identified, then all available human, fiscal, and other resources should then be made available for their safe, efficient, and effective delivery.

Based on the above approach, I believe that the people of the CNMI continue to need services for the community's health, safety, education, public utilities, public roads and transportation, communications, and other services currently being provided by our Commonwealth government. Secondly, because of the obvious separation of our Senatorial Districts by water and other social and economic differences, I strongly feel that we must empower local government so that people residing on the respective Senatorial Districts be empowered with the ability to provide and deliver essential public services. However because of the small CNMI population, I also feel that redundant bureaucracies on each of the Senatorial Districts may not be the answer. Instead, I proposed for the implementation of a hybrid system where local and central government can co-exist and where existing bureaucracy can serve both the local and central government. The intergovernmental separation will be most obvious and visible based on functions rather than location or governmental unit.

As such, I recommend that matters affecting public health, safety, foreign/federal relations, and related areas be clearly reserved for the central government's primary functions and responsibilities. Consultations with the local government, however, should continue. Those functions and responsibilities falling within the purview of the autonomous agencies, such as the Public School System, Northern Marianas College, Retirement Fund, Civil Service Commission, and related agencies should be clearly reserved to their respective boards. All other public services and functions should clearly be reserved for the responsibilities of local government. Other than those clearly reserved for the local government, a provision, as noted in the Delegate Proposal Number 376, should also be created to provide that *whatever the Commonwealth government does not prohibit, the local government shall reserve the right to create.*

The existing Mayors and Municipal Councils should be retained and empowered to deliver critical and essential public services based on their local resources and priorities. However, unlike current Constitutional provisions, local government must be empowered with the authority to generate revenues through taxes, fees, and other related activities independent of the central government. The Municipal Councils must be empowered with the authority to appropriate local revenues for their respective Senatorial Districts. The Mayors should then administer and implement their local programs.

The Office of the Mayor of the Northern Islands should be retained to function as the lead entity to promote the social and economic growth of the islands north of Saipan. Further, the Office should be the entity responsible for the coordination of programs and activities as permanent re-settlement efforts of Anatahan, Alamagan, and Agrigan intensify.

As stated earlier, I feel that for a government to truly exist, it must have the ability to generate revenues to enable it to provide essential public services. Without this ability, a government will be powerless to act and powerless to respond to the needs of their respective communities. This situation is what we have today for the so-called local government in the CNMI. With a few exceptions, including the local initiative allowing casino on Tinian and bingo, bato, and cockfighting fees for Saipan, the CNMI local government totally depend on the governor and the legislature for their existence. This has been a tremendous obstacle for the people of Tinian, Rota, and most visibly for the people of the Northern Islands.

Our northern frontier has been ignored and abandoned by our government. Oftentimes, this perennial neglect is perpetrated under the guise of environmental preservation. Such neglect has resulted in the lack of basic infrastructure in any of the islands north of Saipan making safe and sanitary living conditions very difficult. Local residents are forced to relocate to Saipan as basic services are non-existent in the Northern Islands. The Northern Islanders are totally dependent on rain for their water needs. Electrical power is almost non-existent as only small portable generators are available. Public roads are non-existent as only narrow trails are available. With exception to the Pagan runway, none of the islands have any port facilities making transportation between Saipan and the islands to the north difficult, unreliable, and oftentimes unsafe. Communication is totally dependent on antiquated radio communication systems used by the Emergency Management Office. The list of neglect is lengthy but one thing is clear -- the indigenous residents of Anatahan, Alamagan, Pagan, Agrigan, and Asuncion have long desire to return to their homeland as soon as basic services are in place.

Since I took over the Office of the Mayor in the early part of 1994, I have embarked on an ambitious journey to accomplish the promises that I have made to my constituents, including bringing in the necessary infrastructures to re-settle Anatahan, Alamagan, and Agrigan. I have approached the governor and the legislature with my request for Capital Improvement Projects to construct small seaport and airport facilities, school classrooms, public roads, water wells and reservoirs, and related services.

Although no infrastructure have yet been constructed, some significant progress have occurred in the last few months. Since all of the islands north of Saipan are still public land, I have initiated communications with the governor and the Department of Public Lands and Natural Resources about the implementation of village homesteading programs. Because of the hard work of Secretary Benigno M. Sablan and the Governor, the village homesteading program may soon be a reality for Anatahan. Once basic services are available on Alamagan and Agrigan, I hope to see the implementation of the village homesteading program on these two islands. The Legislature also awarded us CIP funds from the FY94 year for the construction of a multi-purpose center which will house a school classroom, health dispensary, radio/communications room, and a central government office on Anatahan. Other CIP funds awarded from the FY94 included a 100,000 gallon water tank and the opening of public roads connecting the main west shoreline of Anatahan to the proposed village homesteads, civic center, and airport runway. These three projects were

awarded by the legislature in the last CIP appropriations and I am still hopeful that the governor will assist the people of our Northern frontier in bringing in much needed infrastructure and not interfere with their proposed development and implementation.

I want to make my point clear, however, I proposed to finance the requested infrastructure facilities not only from the CNMI's CIP funds but also through opening economic development by expanding our tourism industry to the North and by capitalizing on our mineral and marine resources that are abundant in the Northern Islands.

I feel that the CNMI's northern frontier possess the most abundant and, perhaps, the richest natural resources. Our tourism industry can greatly benefit from scenic tours of the Anatahan and the Pagan volcanic craters as they are some of the most beautiful areas in the world. Casino gaming operations should be allowed but restricted to areas that are remote to the population centers. I encourage that islands like Sarigan, about 101 miles north of Saipan, be opened for casino operations. We should then require the developers to bring in some of the necessary infrastructures to Anatahan, Alamagan, and Agrigan. Further, commercial fishing in and around the Northern Islands stretching from Saipan to Farallon de Pajaros, especially with the proposed 200 miles EEZ, is considered one of the best in this region of the world. In addition, volcanic mineral resources such as basalt, pozzolan, ash, and related minerals are abundant on Pagan. Our government must find a way to collect much needed revenues from commercial fishing and mining operations to benefit the people of the CNMI in general and the people of the Northern Islands in particular.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman and honorable delegates of this Committee, I feel that God has given us the resources to live life to the fullest. I know we are a people of strong moral convictions and who are proud of their origins and heritage. Our abundant natural resources have yet to be harvested to help us make the CNMI a safe place and a true paradise.

There is no reason why we cannot provide basic services to all islands of the CNMI where our citizens choose to live. I see no reason why we should limit our economic growth and prosperity and continue to see rapid congestions on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota when ten other islands north of Saipan are left abandoned, three or more of which can be safely used for permanent settlements.

Mr. Chairman and honorable delegates of this Committee, I pray that the blueprint you are all preparing will chart a path towards a brighter future for our children. I need your help. The people of the Northern Islands need your help. Please empower the local government with the opportunity to generate their revenues and to appropriate them based on their local needs and priorities. Only then, can our government be truly accountable to the people and be genuinely responsive to the needs of our various communities.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to share my views with you and other honorable members of this Committee. If you have any questions regarding my proposed

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Constitutional Amendments, my staff and I are happy to be here to try and see what we can do to elaborate on the details of our proposals.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph T. Ogumoro', written in a cursive style.

JOSEPH T. OGUMORO
Mayor of the Northern Islands

xc: Hon. Herman T. Guerrero, President, Third Northern Mariana Islands Constitutional Convention
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