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Statement to the United Nations Trusteeship Council by Lazarus

E. Salii, Adviser, United States Delegation June 8, 1967

I bring to you and all other members of this august body greetings from my colleagues in the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Congress of Micronesia and the people of the Trust Territory. It is a great privilege and honor for me to be accorded the opportunity to appear before you today. I will always cherish the honor and the experience.

Our High Commissioner, the Honorable William R. Norwood, has amply presented to this Council the past accomplishments, current programs and future planning for the Trust Territory Government, and there is no need for me to impose on the time and indulgence of this Council in repeating these matters.

There are three ways to view and evaluate problems and conditions in the Trust Territory - through the eyes of the U. N. Visiting Missions to the Trust Territory, the most recent such mission having visited the area earlier this year; through the eyes of the Administering Authority; or through the eyes of the Micronesian people themselves.

I would like to address myself to the task of presenting to this Council a brief review of some of the major problems we have and areas of progress which have been made, as I think the Micronesians in general see them and specifically as I think the Congress of Micronesia sees these problems and progress.

It should be pointed out at the outset that the challenges in Micronesia are enormous in their complexity and magnitude and nearly overwhelming in their profusion and seeming ability to multiply, while the tools, the equipment and the resources necessary to combat these challenges are not always available either in the quality or quantity required.

The mission of developing a viable economy - a primary consideration in the total advancement of the Territory - has been difficult, although much has been accomplished and more continues to be accomplished. While recognizing that many of the difficulties

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in developing a viable economy in Micronesia are due to physical factors which have built-in limitations on what can be done, such as the islands' scattered location, small size and insularity as well as their deficiency in most of the natural resources generally considered essential for the development of industry, we feel that there are existing problems and conditions which can and should be eliminated in order to accelerate further economic development and growth.

Several of these are easily identifiable:

The existing tariff on Micronesian goods entering the United States, the restrictions on trade between Micronesia and foreign countries, the restrictive policies on immigration and admission of non-U.S. citizens into the Trust Territory, and the infusion of more U. S. and foreign capital and skilled manpower should at this time be examined and evaluated in the light of present demands and future economic needs of the Territory.

The role of the Government in the total economy of Micronesia must be tempered by the increasing capacity of Micronesian entrepreneurs to assume a more active role and participation in the economic development of the islands. Personally, I do not want to see the government dominating the whole field of economic development programs merely because it has financial credit, monopoly of skilled manpower, size and organization. I prefer seeing the government steering away from economic development programs and providing incentives to the private sector to wax and grow in a laissez faire atmosphere. If this means bringing in foreign capital and labor, we would like to see a movement in that direction by abandoning certain restrictions with the approval of the Congress of Micronesia; maintaining or creating, however, whatever safeguards will be necessary to insure that the Micronesians will share in the resulting prosperity.

We would like to see in the Trust Territory greater progress in the modernization and rationalization of land development, agriculture, forestry and fishery programs. Many Micronesians feel that the Trust Territory can benefit from technical assistance and expertise available from other U. S. Government Agencies, such as the Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Land Management, Public Health Service, the Department of Labor and so forth. The Peace Corps has been a blessing to Micronesia and the programs under the Office of Economic Opportunity which are just beginning to get off the ground look very promising.

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Perhaps more technical assistance and experts could be obtained from South Pacific countries such as Australia and New Zealand, and so forth.

The Government continues to hold title to and control a great percentage of arable land. The homestead program as a method of returning lands to Micronesians has not kept abreast with modern land development and land management practices, with the steadily growing population and the concurrent demand for planned agriculture, industrial and residential subdivisions. As land is basic to a viable economy, it is essential that land management be staffed in each district with experienced professional and technical personnel and that training programs currently in operation be enlarged.

In two and perhaps three districts, the people have shown an eagerness to develop tourism as an industry, but such a proposition appears saddled with difficulties such as land use planning, poor water systems, lack of power and sewage systems, combined with poor roads and a generally inadequate transportation system. It is encouraging to the Micronesians to note, however, that the Administration is cognizant of these difficulties and of the great potential of tourism in Micronesia and has already taken some of the necessary first steps in the direction of developing this industry.

While traveling through the six districts in January and February, the Interim Committees of the Senate and the House of the Congress of Micronesia noted that public health services, especially in the outer islands, continue to be plagued by difficulties in communications and transportation, inadequate supplies and acceptable facilities and properly trained manpower to do a decent job.

In the field of education, high school graduates are generally ill-prepared to earn a living in Micronesia. This is because the curriculum is primarily academic and college preparatory, even though the great majority of the high school graduates do not go on to college. It is our hope that the current study of our educational system will give breadth, scope, orientation and direction as to where our school program should head. It appears that we need, not only Micronesians in law, medicine and the liberal arts, but also and in greater numbers - those trained as technicians, administrative, executive and managerial personnel, bookkeepers, skilled machine operators, craftsmen and other skilled workers. Thus, our educational system should at this stage be oriented towards high-level Micronesian manpower for the critically important administrative, technical and educational work of development and nation-building, together with intermediate-level supporting occupations and towards making provision for training larger numbers of skilled workers, artisans, craftsmen and operatives required for an island-economic development.

In commerce, the business capacity of corporations and businesses in the Trust Territory lacks the standing and stature to secure loans and financial credit on par with like businesses and companies outside the Territory at the prevailing market level of economic activity. The several credit unions and cooperative associations which serve now as a mainstay of commercial activity for many Micronesians are only recently beginning to have any significant influence on the stream of commerce and would not have any overriding effect on the total economy for some time to come.

By recounting all these things, I do not mean to slight the progress that has been made in Micronesia, nor do I intend to belittle the positive and ambitious plans and programs now being carried out in the Trust Territory. Nor do I mean to imply that these problems are the problems of the Administration alone, and not of the Micronesians themselves as well. Rather, by doing so I feel that this body can better appreciate the many challenges, problems and tasks remaining before all of us in Micronesia, despite unremitting and sustained efforts of the Administering Authority and the people of Micronesia to seek and explore new avenues of solutions to solve these problems.

My colleagues in the House and the Senate of the Congress of Micronesia place great trust and confidence in our energetic High Commissioner and in the United States as the Administering Authority for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. There is, I believe, a genuine feeling of partnership between the Administration and the Congress of Micronesia. The development program for the Trust Territory which our High Commissioner has presented here has our explicit endorsement. The newly raised ceiling of federal grant expenditures in the Trust Territory coming shortly after the release of the Nathan Report and the Economic Development Plan for Micronesia is a timely blessing for the people of Micronesia.

The Congress of Micronesia intends to play a key role in the direction and the manner in which the over-all development of Micronesia will take. Although circumscribed by the extent of its legal authority and the resources available at its disposal, the Congress strongly favors more involvement and participation of Micronesians in the political and economic development of the Trust Territory. There are already some very encouraging signs that we are going to move in this direction more rapidly.

But perhaps this presentation will not be complete if I do not make mention of the political future of Micronesia. We in the Congress of Micronesia are well aware of the urgency of this question and have deliberated upon it during the last two sessions of the

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Congress. We recognize that Micronesia is but one of three remaining Trusteeships and the strides that Nauru and New Guinea are making towards self-determination and, possible independence in the next few years have not gone unnoticed by the Congress of Micronesia. A number of measures in bills and resolutions were introduced in the last session of the Congress proposing to create a commission to make a study and recommendations; others called upon designated persons to make such a study and make known their feelings. These expressions of interest, however, are only tentative and perhaps premature. We do not want to exercise, at this point in time, our interest and right of self-determination until our people have acquired a first-hand knowledge of both the benefits and the responsibilities under each of the possible alternatives in the present 20th Century context. We want a chance to learn the issues so that we can wisely exercise the right to choose our political future. We hope that time is on our side. We feel most fortunate that during this interim period we have as our partner in the development of our islands the United States of America.

The Micronesians do not ask for much. We do not want to have our islands as a political buffer area nor do we want to be buffeted around in international politics. We would like to have, however, a measure of economic well-being, a measure of acceptable living standards, and a measure of political stability so that whatever the decision will be regarding our future political status Micronesia can meaningfully contribute to the peace and security of the Community of nations. This, after all, was the purpose, if not the reason, Micronesia came under the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations, and it is certainly the reason for which I was selected by my colleagues in the House of Representatives of the Congress of Micronesia to appear before you today. Thank you very much.

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