

3/24/76

DRAFT PUBLIC STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT

I would like to take this opportunity to extend to the people of the Northern Mariana Islands my personal greetings and to convey to them my pleasure with the results of the plebiscite held on June 17, 1975. I have been informed that a substantial majority <sup>has</sup> ~~have~~ voted in favor of the Commonwealth Covenant in free and open balloting observed by the United Nations and preceded by a fair and impartial education program. I wish personally to congratulate and commend all of those who were responsible for the conduct of the plebiscite, including the Plebiscite Commissioner and his staff, the Voter Registration Board and the Plebiscite Advisory Committee.

The people of the Northern Marianas have now spoken. The next step will be consideration of the Covenant by the Congress of the United States. I intend to submit without delay the Covenant to the Congress with my strong endorsement for its early favorable action. It is my earnest hope that we may look forward to further steps in the near future which will move the people of the Northern Mariana Islands still closer to the long-desired ultimate goal of political union with the United States. I know the American people join with me in sending to the people of the Northern Mariana Islands our warmest regards.

Military Bases in the Northern Marianas

Q: Are there any plans to build a military base in the Northern Marianas?

A: The Covenant gives the United States the option of leasing some 18,000 acres for defense use, but the Department of Defense has no current plans to build a facility on this land.

Cost of Commonwealth Status

Q: What will Commonwealth status for the Northern Marianas cost the U. S. taxpayer?

A: Very little. The major cost spelled out in the Covenant is an annual grant to the Government of the Northern Mariana Islands in the amount of \$14 million, in constant 1975 dollars. Since the United States now bears the cost of government in these islands, this amount is approximately the same that we would anticipate spending there in any event.

If the United States decides to pick up the option to lease approximately 18,000 acres for defense use, it will make a one-time payment to the Northern Mariana Islands of \$19,520,600 for two consecutive 50 year leases.

U. N. Approval of the Marianas Covenant

Q: Will the United Nations approve the Covenant?

A: Most of the provisions of the Covenant are consistent with the Trusteeship Agreement and will be implemented while that agreement is still in effect. The balance -- including those sections of the Covenant extending United States sovereignty to the islands and citizenship to the residents -- will come into effect only after termination of the Trusteeship Agreement. The United States has informed the United Nations Trusteeship Council that it intends to seek termination of the Trusteeship Agreement for the entire Trust Territory simultaneously. We have kept the United Nations fully informed of developments in the Trust Territory. The United Nations Trusteeship Council sent a special mission to observe the plebiscite on the Covenant. We will take up the question of termination of the Trusteeship Agreement with the Security Council at the appropriate time.