

See ID 428146

446 846

Office of the Resident Representative to the United States
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

2121 R STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008

PHONE: (202) 328-3847
TELEX: 650 261 6638



December 8, 1986

The Honorable Ronald Reagan
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Through your proclamation on November 3, 1986, the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America (Covenant) is fully established. It was an historic occasion for the Northern Mariana Islands (NMI) for it was a dream come true--to join this great nation as a member of the family! Even after waiting for what seemed to be so many years, it was an exciting day when the Covenant became fully implemented. In my letter of September 26, I asked you to so proclaim the Northern Mariana Islands a commonwealth which you did. I thank you, Mr. President, on behalf of my people who will be forever grateful to you and the American people.

I must say that as a naturalized U.S. citizen since 1967, I was overjoyed that at long last, the rest of my people will see another dream come true--becoming U.S. citizens! To most of my people the main feature of the Covenant is a provision that confers U.S. citizenship on them. Unlike other Americans who were born Americans or granted citizenship through annexation of their territories, we, through our inalienable right of self-determination, chose to become American citizens.

This action has long been awaited by NMI residents, but unfortunately it now appears that as many as 1,000 islanders, most of them born in the Northern Mariana Islands before we negotiated the Covenant, will be denied American citizenship due to an adverse interpretation of the Covenant by the Department of State and other federal agencies.

Mr. President, I am talking here about NMI citizens who not only have been voting in the Northern Mariana Islands all their lives, but also voted to approve the Covenant in the plebiscite which was called by the United States. Under federal guidelines

Approved of the Ronald Reagan Library

The Honorable Ronald Reagan
December 8, 1986
Page 2

for the plebiscite in the Northern Marianas, "only persons who...meet such other qualifications, including timely registration, as are promulgated by the United States as administering authority will be eligible to vote...." (Emphasis added.) [U.S. Public Law 94-241] Now, we are being informed that the State Department has refused to issue these individuals (and their children) U.S. passports because they failed to meet what we regard as highly questionable interpretations of the Covenant by the U.S. government.

This incredible ruling by the Federal Government could cause an uproar in our islands as our own constitution which was sanctioned by the Covenant pursuant to U.S. Public Law 94-241 requires that all voters now be American citizens. So the decision by the State Department in denying our people their U.S. passports has the effect of also taking away their voting rights in the Commonwealth.

Even if these people were to become permanent residents of the United States through the "immediate relative" status as State Department officials are quick to suggest as a remedy, this is a solution which is cruel and insensitive to them. It is insult adding to injury to be told that they may not become U.S. citizens as they had anticipated for the past decade, but also to be told that they are disfranchised and non-citizens in their own islands!

There is no doubt that this problem could be resolved by the U.S. Congress. But I feel, Mr. President, this course of action should be a last resort, even if it were a more expeditious process than to do so administratively by the Executive Branch through the intervention of your office.

A review of the legislative history of P.L. 94-241 and the negotiations of the Covenant will show clearly that it was the intent of both the United States and the Northern Mariana Islands governments to grant U.S. citizenship to all persons born in the Northern Mariana Islands--at least, those who were born prior to the negotiations. The Covenant should be interpreted that, as one Member of Congress who was intimately involved with the negotiations said, "all possible ambiguities should be resolved in favor of the people and government of the Northern Mariana Islands."

Again, Mr. President, the people being denied U.S. passports and, therefore, considered aliens in our own islands are native Chamorros and Carolinians who were born in the Northern Mariana Islands (not immigrants to the Commonwealth), many of whom were born long before the Trust Territory (TT) was ever conceived in anybody's mind. Yet, the criteria for U.S. citizenship, maintains the State Department, is TT citizenship.

Reproduced at the Ronald Reagan Library

Reproduced at the Ronald Reagan Library

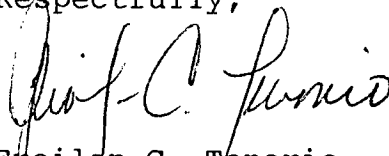
The Honorable Ronald Reagan
December 8, 1986
Page 3

The Trust Territory as far as I, my people, and the United Nations are concerned is an agency of the U.S. government. How can the United States insist on using its own law as a qualification for our acquiring U.S. citizenship when we were supposedly negotiating as a free people? Should not the terms be based on our own nationality? Our own and unique identity?

Whatever we were, Mr. President, we were citizens of the Northern Mariana Islands first. We were TT citizens, second. We were negotiating our future status as citizens of the Northern Mariana Islands, not as TT citizens. The basis for U.S. citizenship should be citizenship of the Northern Mariana Islands. This is the intent and the spirit of the Covenant which we urge that U.S. officials follow.

I cannot stress too strongly the need for swift action by all concerned parties to prevent future complications and the instant disfranchisement of my people. I stand ready to be of assistance to your Administration as we jointly seek a mutually satisfactory solution to the present situation. I thank you for your prompt attention to this request and look forward to hearing from you in the near future.

Respectfully,



Froilan C. Tenorio
Resident Representative

THE WHITE HOUSE OFFICE

REFERRAL

DECEMBER 29, 1986 DEPT OF INTERIOR

1959 '86 DEC 30 AM 11:35

TO: DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
ATTN: RICK MONTOYA

OFF OF THE SECRETARY
EXECUTIVE SECRET

ACTION REQUESTED:
DIRECT REPLY, FURNISH INFO COPY

DESCRIPTION OF INCOMING:

ID: 446846
MEDIA: LETTER, DATED DECEMBER 8, 1986
TO: PRESIDENT REAGAN
FROM: THE HONORABLE FROILAN C. TENORIO
RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE
TO THE UNITED STATES
COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN
MARIANA ISLANDS
2121 R STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON DC 20008

SUBJECT: EXPRESSES CONCERN THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS HAVE NOT BEEN
GRANTED U.S. CITIZENSHIP IN ACCORDANCE WITH
THE NOV 3 86 COVENANT TO ESTABLISH THE
ISLANDS AS A COMMONWEALTH IN POLITICAL
UNION WITH THE U. S.

PROMPT ACTION IS ESSENTIAL -- IF REQUIRED ACTION HAS NOT BEEN
TAKEN WITHIN 9 WORKING DAYS OF RECEIPT, PLEASE TELEPHONE THE
UNDERSIGNED AT 456-7486.

RETURN CORRESPONDENCE, WORKSHEET AND COPY OF RESPONSE
(OR DRAFT) TO:
AGENCY LIAISON, ROOM 91, THE WHITE HOUSE, 20500

SALLY KELLEY
DIRECTOR OF AGENCY LIAISON
PRESIDENTIAL CORRESPONDENCE