

March 24, 1976

Office of the White House Press Secretary

NOTICE TO THE PRESS

The President has signed H. J. Res. 549 - Northern Mariana Islands -- Commonwealth status. This bill approves the "Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America."

The Northern Marianas consist of 21 small islands which together with Guam (an unincorporated U. S. territory) form the Western Pacific island group known as the Mariana Islands. Some 14,500 people inhabit the Northern Marianas and this archipelago plus the Carolines and the Marshall Islands constitute the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands or as it is popularly known, Micronesia, a United Nations strategic trusteeship under United States administration.

The Covenant's ten Articles are briefly outlined below:

- I. Political Relationship, upon termination of the Trusteeship Agreement, to be a self-governing Commonwealth under the sovereignty of the United States which will have complete responsibility for and authority over foreign affairs and defense matters.
- II. Constitution to be locally formulated to provide for a republican form of government similar to that of United States.
- III. United States Citizenship to be conferred on those qualified Marianans desiring it, at the time the Presidential Proclamation to terminate the Trusteeship Agreement is promulgated.
- IV. Judicial Authority to be divided between the judiciary established by the Northern Mariana Constitution and a U. S. District Court which will be part of the same U. S. judicial circuit as Guam.
- V. Applicability of Laws of the United States, including specific sections of the U. S. Constitution, certain specific laws itemized in the Covenant.
- VI. Revenue and Taxation provisions apply United States income taxes as a territorial tax and customs duties, but the Northern Marianas Government may levy additional taxes.
- VII. U. S. Financial Assistance in the form of direct grants of \$14 million each year for seven years for government operations, capital improvement projects, and economic developments.
- VIII. Trust Territory Property to be transferred to the Government of the Northern Marianas.
- IX. Representation for the Northern Marianas provided by a Resident Representative to the United States if provided for by the Northern Marianas' constitution or law.
- X. Effective Dates provide for a phasing in of the provisions with (a) some becoming effective upon approval of the Covenant by the United States, (b) others within 180 days after approval by the United States of the Northern Mariana constitution, and (c) the rest upon the termination of the U. N. Trusteeship Agreement and the establishment of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.

The above cited Covenant was presented, as required, for approval by the people of the Northern Marianas in a plebiscite called by the United States with United Nations Trusteeship Council observers, on June 17, 1975.