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PETITION FROM MR. JOAQUIN P. VILLANUEVA, REPRESENTATIVE,  
NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE, CONCERNING  
THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE  
P.O. Box 129  
Saipan, Mariana Islands, 96950

12 May 1978

The President  
Trusteeship Council  
United Nations  
New York, New York

Dear Mr. President:

My name is Joaquin P. Villanueva and I am a member of the Congress of the Northern Mariana Islands soon to be a commonwealth in political association with the United States of America.

Under the terms of the Covenant to Establish a Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in Political Union with the United States of America, 1/ the above status will be achieved upon termination of the Trusteeship Agreement, 2/ date indeterminate as of now.

1/ The text of the Covenant is contained in Official Records of the Trusteeship Council, Forty-second Session, Sessional Fascicle, document T/1759, annex.

2/ Trusteeship Agreement for the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands  
(United Nations publication, Sales No. 1957.VI.A.1).

On this point, it should be said that the rationale prompting the delay in granting the Northern Mariana Islands full fledged commonwealth status cannot be supported in logic.

It is unthinkable that the Trusteeship Agreement should not be terminated piecemeal, only after all districts have decided their political future. This in turn means that the Northern Marianas currently labouring under what is anonymously termed "interim commonwealth status", must wait until such time as the remaining districts of the entity known collectively as the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands have reconciled their positions vis-à-vis the United States; a time uncertain but, slated as the earliest at which the Trusteeship will terminate.

To me, the condition precedent to freeing the Northern Marianas from the trusteeship is entirely illogical; the restraint proves nothing. Because the negotiations between the United States and the remainder of the Trust Territory in no way touches or concerns the Northern Marianas, it appears a glaring non sequitur to hold to a time frame which has no real significance for anyone, but in which we find ourselves.

In addition to the unnecessary uncertainty under which we in the Northern Marianas exist generally, I would venture to call attention to several specifics of recent occurrence which have given rise to serious concerns.

As this body is aware, we have been subject to the Trusteeship Agreement since 1947. During this long span of time, we have had little or nothing to say relative to our destiny.

On 9 January 1978, pursuant to a proclamation by the President of the United States, we achieved the aforementioned status of interim commonwealth - whatever that signifies in the scheme of international relationship among countries of the world which we in the Northern Marianas interpret to convey a measure of control over internal matters.

Sad to say, a few recent events have served to disabuse this notion held by our people.

At the present time, the people of the Northern Marianas are far from affluent, the average wage being approximately \$US 1.00 per hour. Yet over universal protest vociferously and vehemently broadcast, most particularly to the Civil Aeronautics Board, Air Micronesia, a subsidiary of Continental Airlines, was permitted to raise the fare between Saipan and Guam, a distance of about 140 miles, from \$US 57.40 to \$US 72.00, an increase of \$US 14.60.

Guam, it can be said, is mecca to the entire Western Pacific but to us in the Northern Marianas, it is not only our spiritual home but also the cultural and ethnic nucleus of our people. Travel to and from, to attend weddings, funerals, commencements, visit our sick, our relatives, to attend school, ad infinitum, is not self-indulgence but a real necessity devoid of extravagance.

The curtailment of frequency of travel imposed by the recent price hike - most can no longer afford the twenty-minute trip - has not only disconcerted our people but has awakened them to the traumatizing reality that even in matters touching their daily lives in so drastic a manner, the concern of the Civil Aeronautics Board was not for the welfare of the Northern Marianas but for the welfare of Air Micronesia.

Another instance is that surrounding the selection of a judge for the newly created federal court in the Northern Marianas. Although the choice of Mr. Roger St. Pierre, a man who has served not only the Northern Marianas but the entire Trust Territory in an exemplary manner for many many years, was made known to the United States Government in varied and no uncertain terms, we are being forced against our common will to accept the selection made for us by our friends, the senatorial delegation from Hawaii.

Is this self-determination? Is this to have control over internal matters of vital importance to our people? How far can this state of affairs be permitted to go? If, each time the Northern Marianas rises to speak its mind on matters clearly within the sphere of local concern, must it, as in the case of the judgeship, fold its tent and silently steal away, leaving the field to a contestant who can show no right other than might, or, as in the case of air fare rates, be subordinated to the financial interests of moneyed monopoly interests?

I do not believe so, but I do believe that the internal circumstances we find ourselves in will persist just so long as our equivocal status is not resolved, and it can only be resolved by terminating the trusteeship as it applies to the Northern Marianas as soon as possible to the end that our commonwealth be in a position to treat with the United States from a position of strength in those matters which do not infringe upon the rights of the United States concerning foreign policy and defence but which, by fair interpretation, are really local concerns.

I plead with you in my name and the names of all my countrymen to take the initiative in hastening the day of our deliverance from the Trusteeship Agreement.

We have fared well under the aegis of the United Nations and we are grateful but it is time to sever the umbilical cord and to permit the child to commence maturing on its own.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Joaquin P. VILLANUEVA  
Congressman