

PRESS

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

D6

September 15, 1983
No. 342



MARSHALL ISLANDS VOTERS APPROVE FREE ASSOCIATION WITH THE UNITED STATES

On September 7, the electorate of the Marshall Islands voted in significant numbers to approve the Compact of Free Association. Final unofficial results from the United Nations observed plebiscite show an approximate sixty percent approval margin for the Compact. The vote was preceded by a public education program administered by the Marshall Islands Government.

Under the Compact and its subsidiary agreements, which were negotiated over a fourteen year period, the Marshall Islands will be fully self-governing and will conduct its own foreign and domestic affairs. The United States will provide economic assistance to the island nation of 32,000 people and will guarantee its freedom and territorial integrity through the defense and security authority granted it by the Compact.

The Compact will come into effect after it has been approved by the United States Congress and the present Trusteeship arrangement has been terminated. President Reagan, in a televised address, has committed his support to the Compact and the Administration plans an early submission to Congress. The Marshallese people have long sought the termination of the Trusteeship. Their vote in the plebiscite, which is recognized as a sovereign act of self-determination, will provide the basis for termination of the trusteeship status.

The plebiscite in the Marshall Islands was preceded by an intense political campaign which highlighted several of the issues in the Compact. Chief among these are the provisions of the negotiated settlement which address the legacy of the nuclear weapons testing program conducted by the United States in the Marshall Islands between 1946 and 1958. Most of the traditional and elected political leadership of the Marshall Islands urged approval of the Compact and in the end their advice was followed by a majority of the Marshallese people.

The Marshall Islands is one of the three states of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands to conduct plebiscites on the Compact of Free Association. Palau, on the western end of the Trust Territory, conducted its plebiscite on February 10, 1983, and the

cc
John K. ...
w/

For further information contact:

-2-

Compact was approved by a sixty-two percent majority, however, conflicts between the Constitution and the Compact must be resolved. In the Federated States of Micronesia, seventy-nine percent of the people voted to approve the Compact on June 21. The Federated States has also completed its governmental approval process.

The Compact defines the relationship between the United States and the new Micronesian states, as well as their international political status after the trusteeship is terminated. Now that the people of the Marshall Islands have approved the Compact, it is ready for submission to the United States Congress where it requires majority approval by both houses. After such approval, the United States will take up the question of Trusteeship termination in the United Nations.

The Northern Mariana Islands, a fourth political jurisdiction in the Trust Territory, voted in 1975 to approve a negotiated commonwealth arrangement with the United States. Under this arrangement, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands will become U.S. citizens and United States sovereignty will extend to the islands when the trusteeship is terminated. All four political jurisdictions of the Trust Territory now have locally elected constitutional governments.

The United States has administered the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (TTPI) since 1947 under the Trusteeship Agreement with the United Nations. The islands comprising the TTPI were administered by Japan under a League of Nations mandate between World War I and World War II and were liberated from Japanese control by United States forces during the last years of World War II. Today, economic activity in the islands is centered in agriculture, fishing and tourism. The Compact contains incentives for investment, trade and business development which will assist the islands in developing a stronger private sector. The Compact also guarantees economic development assistance from the United States.

(For further information, please contact James D. Berg of the Office for Micronesian Status Negotiations at (202) 343-9143).