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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

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NOTE TO CAROL RASCO

From: Jeremy Ben-Ami *JA*

Subject: Congressional Representation for the Northern Marianas *file*

As I mentioned to you previously, Keith Mason (Intergovernmental), Janet Murguia (Legislative) and I have agreed to advise Ed Cohen, the President's Special Representative to negotiations with the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (CNMI) not to endorse giving the CNMI a Congressional delegate at this time. As you requested, the following gives a thumbnail sketch of our reasons and some background on the issue:

- o 1. Congressional Perspective The issue of territorial representation in Congress is touchy. The 1993 Congressional session began with the deal to give the four delegates to Congress the ability to vote in the Committee of the Whole. This move by the Democratic leadership was taken badly by Republicans and set what some consider part of the negative, partisan tone for the remainder of the session. The September before a Congressional election is not the best time for the administration to take a position on this issue. No one on the Hill wants us to touch it right now.
- o 2. Problems in the CNMI The CNMI is coming under a lot of pressure to improve their human rights and labor conditions. I've attached a copy of a recent Washington Post article on the topic. Until the CNMI have addressed these issues, many on the Hill are not prepared to reward them with a delegate.
- o 3. Is the CNMI too small for a Delegate? The CNMI has a population of 65,000, only 23,000 of whom are U.S. citizens, less than any other U.S. territory. Congressional districts have 500,000 to 600,000 residents. Some in Congress believe the CNMI is too small to warrant a delegate. One option you should be aware of is a proposal that the CNMI share a delegate with Guam, which has representation, five times the population, and from which it was separated after the Spanish-American War. However, both Guam and CNMI have reason to oppose this arrangement.

U.S. Pacific Paradise Is Hell For Some Foreign Workers

Filipinos Report Beatings, Rapes, Lockups

By William Branigin
Washington Post Foreign Service

ROTA, Northern Marianas—For most visitors, this tiny U.S. island is an idyllic place of flowering flame trees, turquoise waters and homey cordiality where motorists routinely wave to each other. Natives like to call it "the Friendly Island."

But for many foreign workers over the last several years, a little slice of paradise in the Pacific has become an outpost of tropical hell under the American flag—a place where labor and human rights are routinely violated by islanders who are U.S. citizens.

According to U.S. officials, human rights advocates, church sources and victims of alleged abuses, the exploitation of guest workers, most of

them from the Philippines, has become practically a way of life for indigenous employers on Rota, which belongs to the U.S.-affiliated Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The commonwealth is a chain of formerly Japanese-ruled islands captured by the United States in World War II.

Waitresses have been forced into prostitution and locked up during their free time, the sources say. Housemaids have been beaten and raped. Farm laborers have been treated as virtual slaves. Construction workers have been abandoned without pay. And foreign employees of all categories have been routinely cheated of their wages.

Those who complain often have been threatened or deported. In

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BY LARRY FOGEL—THE WASHINGTON POST

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many cases, employers have been allowed to repeat the abuses by simply bringing in replacement workers.

Among the recent victims are two Philippine women who came here to work in a restaurant but were forced to become nude dancers and prostitutes. In another case, a Philippine maid said she was kidnapped, beaten and raped by her employer and had to leave the island to get medical treatment and file a complaint. No criminal charges have been filed in either case.

Their stories are among dozens of cases of physical mistreatment, sexual abuse and labor violations described in interviews, human rights reports and workers' affidavits submitted to U.S. and Philippine authorities. Many other workers have been afraid to complain, residents say.

"It's a small island where everyone knows everyone else," said Commonwealth Gov. Froilan Tenorio, a reformist who took office in January. "They seem to cover up allegations against one of their own."

In a review of labor complaints on Rota, a commonwealth panel "has found that in case after case, labor law and regulations were violated to the benefit of employers of alien workers," the governor's office said Aug. 16. It noted that "there were also more serious complaints . . . of physical and mental abuse as well as sexual harassment and assault."

A recent report by a Roman Catholic church organization cited a "human rights crisis" on the island against a background of "racist bias" toward foreign workers and "extreme dysfunction" in the commonwealth society generally.

"Abuse is so common here that it appears that it has become a normal and accepted practice," American schoolteacher Wendy Doromal wrote in an independent report. "Few, if any, abusers are ever punished . . . and so the abuse continues to grow and grow and grow."

For trying to help workers caught in conditions that she said sometimes amount to slavery, Doromal, her Philippine husband and their family have become targets of death threats, vandalism and vilification. Fearing for their safety, they have decided to leave Rota after eight years here.

Rota's top local official, Mayor Joseph Inos, called the criticism "overblown." Rapes are "bound to happen in any society," he said, and forced prostitution "is not rampant on Rota; it happens everywhere."

Labor and human rights violations have been reported on other islands in the Northern Marianas, notably Saipan and Tinian, but church and social workers say they are particularly acute on Rota. Although most U.S. laws apply in the commonwealth, Rota seems to have slipped largely through the cracks of the federal justice system, whose laws often are not enforced here.

In attempting to pursue some abuse complaints on the islands, federal authorities have regularly encountered challenges to their jurisdiction, hostility from tight-knit local communities and witnesses too intimidated to testify. "It's like trying to do a civil rights action in the old Deep South," said Mikel Schwab, an assistant U.S. attorney on neighboring Guam.

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