

# Inos seeks talks with US on military, immigration issues

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GOVERNOR Eloy S. Inos has written to President Obama to express the CNMI government's concerns regarding the expiration of the CNMI-Only Transitional Worker program in 2019, and the U.S. Department of Defense's desire to acquire new properties in the Northern Marianas.

Inos at the same time invoked Section 902 of the islands' Covenant with the U.S. that allows for consultations between the two governments.

"As you are aware, this important avenue permits an on-going assessment of our important relationship as required not less frequently than every ten years," Inos told the president.

He said the CW and military issues are "sensitive and complicated matters" affecting the relationship between the federal and commonwealth governments.

According to the governor, "the Northern Mariana Islands economic growth and potential development will — given the fact that our total population is only slightly more than 50,000 people — remain heavily dependent upon foreign workers in the immediate short-term future."

The CW program, he said, "is presently set to expire in 2019. This program presently permits approximately 14,000 non-U.S. citizen workers to live in the Northern Mariana Islands and work in essential labor intensive and specialized industries such as in the construction and healthcare provider fields."

Inos added, "The Northern Mariana Islands is currently undergoing significant developments and we foresee no other way to abruptly replace these guest workers at this stage. For these reasons and in order for the business community to prepare for the future, I request consultation on this important matter."

Inos said Section 902 consultations are also appropriate "under the present circumstances as the recently proposed Department of Defense activities in the Northern Mariana Islands will — if carried out as planned — radically impact the fragile marine and terrestrial ecosystems and the quality of life for the citizens and residents living here. Moreover, the Department of Defense's proposed projects will fundamentally alter existing land lease agreements entered into by the Northern Mariana Islands and the United States nearly 40 years ago."

The governor does not believe "that the environmental law process is the appropriate forum in which the Northern Mariana Islands should address or respond to the Department of Defense's efforts to, in effect, unilaterally amend existing land agreements or acquire new lands for additional defense related purposes. The acquisition and use of lands in the Northern Mariana Islands by the military was the most important and contentious issues negotiated by F. Haydn Williams and the members of the Marianas Future Political Status Commission. The Department of Defense's present-day intentions will, in effect, amend the Covenant and other technical documents. This is a serious issue ripe for consultations."

Inos added, "I look forward to beginning this process as soon as possible. In conclusion, I respectfully ask that you consider appointing a personal representative with a deep understanding and appreciation of the underlying historic developments and legal agreements, which ultimately resulted in the Northern Mariana Islands joining the American political family," the governor said.

Press Secretary Ivan Blanco said representatives to 902 talks are appointed directly by the CNMI governor and the president of

the United States.

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