

## Pacific Islanders Demand Freedom

By KATHLEEN TELTSCH

Special to The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y., July 3—Separatist groups from the remote Marshall and Palau Islands pressed demands here this week for independence from the United States-administered Trust Territory of the Pacific.

Four of the petitioners were Marshallese, and they wore oversized yellow lapel buttons with the slogan "Free the Marshall Islands" when they appeared before the Trusteeship Council to report on a catalogue of grievances.

Separatist movements have been growing for years in the three archipelagoes—the Marshalls, Carolines and Marianas

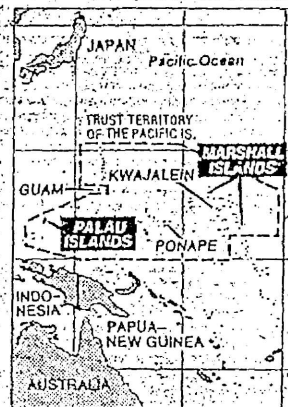
—which make up the trust territory of 2,100 islands scattered across 3 million square miles of the western Pacific. Only 100 of the islands are inhabited.

According to the petitioners and the lawyers assisting them, this was the year to vigorously push the independence campaign, in part because the Northern Marianas had already succeeded in negotiating a separate political commonwealth arrangement with the United States and also because of the American Bicentennial.

Capitalizing on that theme, Tony deBrum, a 31-year-old spokesman for the Marshallese, told the Council that at a time when the United States was celebrating the end of colonial

rule by Britain, it should not play the role of "colonizer" and compel the 27,000 Marshallese to tie their political future to those of the other islands.

He said the United States was maneuvering to maintaining a "colonial stranglehold" over the Marshalls with the aim of



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perpetuating its control of Kwajalein atoll, where the United States maintains a costly missile testing range.

Palau petitioners also pushed their case for separation from the rest of the territory. They denied that their aim was a "greedy consideration" to be the sole beneficiaries of a proposed port for supertankers and also insisted that they wanted to insure a "close and enduring association" with the United States.

Four days of Council hearings brought out a raft of conflicting viewpoints, some allegations from the Marshallese about economic exploitation and from their lawyers about racial bias. A general impression was left that many issues would have to be resolved before the trusteeship agreement is terminated as planned in 1981.

### Neglect Alleged

The most controversial allegation made in the Council was a charge by George Allen, legal counsel for the Marshallese petitioning group, that a recent influenza epidemic followed by an outbreak of spinal meningitis had left 12 Marshallese dead and two children brain damaged on the impoverished island of Ebeye. He complained that none of the seven American physicians assigned to the American colony on neighboring Kwajalein had come to assist in the epidemic.

United States authorities spent 48 hours checking the report by telephone. A spokesman for Peter T. Coleman, the acting High Commissioner for the territory, said the allegations had been largely unsubstantiated. He said there was one death after the outbreak of influenza and meningitis. He said one child suffered brain damage but was improving. No request for help had been made by the medical officer on Ebeye, it was said.

The Pacific territory is the last of the eleven trusteeships administered under the aegis of the United Nations Council. Others have obtained independence or adopted a free association status.

The United States had proposed that the current trusteeship agreement be replaced by a compact of free association. It told the Council that if the Marshallese or the people of Palau do not accept its terms they will be able to register their views in a plebiscite.

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