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INTERVENTION ON HEALTH

PRESENTED BY LU'UKIA KEAUNUI

FOR KAMAKAKUOKALANI CENTER FOR HAWAIIAN STUDIES

Mr. Chair, Members of the Permanent Forum, Distinguished Representatives,
Indigenous brothers and sisters, Aloha mai kakou, mai ka puka ana a ke kau ana o ka Ia.

O wau o Lu'ukia Keaunui, ke kaikamahine a Reyna me Reginald Keaunui III.

Hello, my name is Lu'ukia Keaunui, the daughter of Reyna and Reginald Keaunui
III. I am student at the Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at the University
of Manoa.

“Since contact with Western civilization in 1778, Native Hawaiian culture,
education, socioeconomic status and, most alarmingly, health status has declined
(Blaisdell, 1995, OHA Health Data book. Takenaka, 1995). Current social indicators
show that Native Hawaiians are socio-economically disadvantaged when compared with
other ethnic groups in Hawai'i and suffer disproportionately from morbidity and
mortality.” After the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy in 1893, the lifestyles
of the Hawaiian people changed drastically. Hawaiians were forced to give up their
homelands and taught to live strictly by the so called “Superior Western Culture,” which

forced Hawaiians to eat, live, and breathe in a way that was very foreign to them. Since the time of Western contact until now, Hawaiians have been, and still are, the primary victims of harsh diseases such as cancer, stroke, diabetes, and heart disease. It is the responsibility of those who first introduced these devastating diseases to aid in the recovery of Hawaiian people who are still inflicted with various illnesses as a result of Western contact.

The overall life expectancy in Hawai'i today is almost 76 years for males and more than 82 years for females. These numbers, in comparison to the national average is alarming high, but the numbers are quite different for Hawaiians. According to U.S. Census reports, life expectancy for males is less than 65 years and the life expectancy for females is less than 72 years. By far, these numbers are the lowest in comparison to any other ethnic groups living in Hawai'i. It is only after age 70 that these numbers fall below the state average because there is hardly any Hawaiians left to die.

The pattern of mortality is also especially alarming. The death rate for babies one year and below are double the overall state average while the death rate for babies between one and four years of age is triple the overall state average. These numbers continue to double and triple the equivalent mortality rate in the islands in every age category up to age 30. Because Hawaiians only make up 20% of the state's population,

Hawaiians account for over 75% of the state's deaths for persons less than 18 years of age.

Many factors contribute to the exceptionally high mortality rates of Hawaiians. These include "changeable behavioral risk factors such as diet, obesity, drinking, smoking, and sedentary lifestyle" (Look and Braun, 1995). Other major contributors are the poor access that Hawaiians have to proper health care, language barriers, limited income, lack of health insurance, and lack of culturally compatible care. As a result of these factors, more Hawaiians continue to die from heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes. For full-Hawaiians, the rate of death from heart disease is four times greater than that of non-Hawaiians; for cancer and stroke, it is three and a half times greater than that of non-Hawaiians; and for diabetes, it is nine times greater than that of non-Hawaiians.

Programs have been set up by helping professionals to educate Hawaiians about healthier eating habits and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers have been established. But those professionals were quick to blame Hawaiians for the for their "own allegedly self-destructive practices in the present" (Stannard, 2000). While locating the problem within the victims themselves, professionals continue to forget the "routine oppression and discrimination" (Stannard, 2000) that Hawaiians have to deal with today, which is the basis for all of our problems. As is stated in the United Nations Declaration on the

Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 24, “Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and health practices, including the right to the protection of vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. They also have the right to access, without discrimination, to all medical institutions, health services and medical care.” It is sad to see that although these rights are listed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the harmful doings of those who brought the deadly diseases still continues. Sure, Hawaiians may have access to some of their traditional medicines and practices, but that is not enough. So many resources are lost with the constant development of Hawaiian land and so many lives are lost because of the mistreatment that Hawaiians need to deal with. Before blaming Hawaiians for their “own self-destructive practices in the present,” major social service agencies need to develop an action-oriented plan with regard to housing, income, and the education of Hawaiians. It is these areas that need focusing since they all have a major impact on the health status of Hawaiians today. It is up to those who introduced those deadly diseases to make a step towards what is pono (or what is right) so that Hawaiians can live more healthier and prosperous lives.

In closing, I call for immediate adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ask that Hawai’i be reinscribed on the UN List of Decolonizing Nations