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United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues
Agenda Item 3: Millennium Development Goals

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Aloha to the members of the Permanent Forum and Chair Victoria Tauli-Corpuz

In the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, Member States reaffirmed their commitment to preserve and maintain the knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous communities, Mr. Annan said.

"They recognized that the sustainable development of Indigenous Peoples is crucial in the fight against hunger and poverty.

"They pledged to keep advancing the human rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to present for adoption a UN declaration on Indigenous Peoples' rights as soon as possible." (Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Daily Bulletin 15 May 06)

Recognition by the member states of our right to our practices and, in fact our right to survive is surely a positive change over the policies of national governments throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The Kanaka Maoli of Hawai'i can also testify to the proposition that our practical arts: cultivation; aquaculture; navigation/voyaging and medicinal sciences as we recover them are instrumental in the recovery of our own people from the past two centuries in which the vast majority of our people died and so much of our religion, history and language was oppressed into near oblivion.

But recognition of our knowledge and practices is not sufficient compensation for the increasing militarization of our lands and the appropriation of our lands from the wealth it offers for subsistence into merely subsidizing the already wealthy.

The increasing disparity between wealthy and poor in America, well known to the rest of the world, has a particular resonance to us in Hawai'i as we observe a new wave of Native depopulation as our people flee the islands to avoid poverty and homelessness or succumb to the indignities of addiction, violence and incarceration. America's failure to implement a national health program, well known to the rest of the world, only exacerbates the miserable health statistics of our own people—the direct result of hunger and malnutrition.

The millennium development goals, ensuring environmental sustainability and creating global partnerships for development, can scarcely be imagined by those of us living in islands that are literally being sold from beneath our feet to create new opportunities for tourism and real estate development. We know that where the United States is concerned, simple recognition of these goals is either ironic or mocking when juxtaposed against its actual practices.

While the millennium development goal dealing with AIDS and HIV can not be achieved without the participation, funding and research conducted by member states, others, including, those dealing with poverty, health and education are goals that can be achieved by indigenous peoples themselves when governing nation states cease their interference.

In fact, at least one of the millennium development goals raises a profound concern for Kanaka Maoli. In regard to a universal primary education, I would point out that the near obliteration of our language came only after the U.S. government instituted the American Standard education in Hawai'i shortly after its military occupied our country. Today only one percent of our Native people

can speak our language and we cannot be certain, even after more than 20 years of immersion education in Hawai'i that our language will actually survive.

Yet when we speak with the elders fluent in our ancestral language we rediscover what our people once knew about our world: how they managed the land and shorelines; developed sustainable technologies of agriculture, and aquaculture; invented remarkable technologies and cultural practices for medicinal healing, prenatal care and well-being for the elderly; all centered around visual and performing arts and a profound knowledge of our ancient history.

As we in Hawai'i have reconnected to our ancient language we have seen a revival in Native technologies especially in resource management that have tremendous promise for the physical resurgence of our people, a resurgence that can still be undone by an unfettered federal education policy designed by and for Americans. We would insist that the Permanent Forum either reconsider its second goal or else add clear and unyielding language that just as the right to an education is universal so is the right of a people to design and implement that education in their own words.

And this is not just a moral right but a practical one. The policies and practices of America today are inimical to the survival of people such as ours; poor; landless; and usually portrayed as incapable or undeserving of self-government. That is why we also request that the Permanent Forum advise the UN Decolonization Committee to re-inscribe Hawai'i on the List of Non-Self-Governing Territories and further advise the UN Decolonization Committee to

assist the Kanaka Maoli peoples to be provided the decolonization and self-determination processes and mechanisms of the UN.

Lastly, we note with concern that the Secretary General calls for the adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This, we all know, has been the labor of our Working Group and indigenous communities like ours that supported and ratified that work more than a decade ago. No one agrees more than the Kanaka Maoli that a Declaration needs to be adopted by the United Nations but we believe that we need to have a full discussion of the "Chair's Text" not only within our international body but with our indigenous communities that supported the original draft.

Thank you for permitting me to speak

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