



SECOND SESSION OF THE PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES, MAY 2003

INTERVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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‘Ano ‘ai me ke aloha iā kākou a pau. Greetings to all. Mr. Chairperson, distinguished members of the Permanent Forum, and fellow Indigenous brothers and sisters. My name is Keoni Bunag and I am presenting this intervention on behalf of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Kamakakūokalani, Center for Hawaiian Studies (KCHS), and more importantly on behalf of my kūpuna, my ancestors, whose human rights were continuously violated and whose cries for self-determination have gone unheard.

Human Rights is an issue that overarches all of the topics that have been discussed greatly during this year’s Permanent Forum. There is a direct correlation between the specific topics, such as Economic Development, Health, and Education, and the topic of Human Rights. For example, while Kanaka Maoli, the Indigenous People of Hawai‘i, are 23% of the general population it is not a coincidence that we make up 39% of the adult prison population in Hawai‘i as well as in the continental U.S.¹ This alarming statistic can also be linked to other disturbing statistics that need to be addressed seriously. These disturbing statistics involve the focus of this year’s permanent forum, Indigenous Youth.

Statistics indicated a progressive substance abuse from the 6th through the 12th grades. These substances include alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, methamphetamine, and ecstasy. In a survey done in 2000, 24.2% of 6th graders reported to have used alcohol, 29.1% of which were Kanaka Maoli. In the same survey 77.2% of 12th graders having also reported to have used

¹ Office of Hawaiian Affairs Data Book, 2002.

alcohol, 83% of which were Kanaka Maoli. 3% of 6th graders said they have used marijuana. Of that 5% were Kanaka Maoli. 46% of 12th graders reported to have used marijuana, and of that 58% were Kanaka Maoli. As for cocaine, 5.8% of 12th graders reported that they have used cocaine and of that 7% were Kanaka Maoli. These statistics indicate that as the youth get older, the statistics only worsen.

Kanaka Maoli youth in Hawai'i accounted for nearly 38% of all arrest for criminal offenses such as theft, drug sale and possession, sex offenses, and assaults. Of all juvenile arrest for possession of marijuana, 41% were Kanaka Maoli. 41% of all juvenile arrest made for assault were Kanaka Maoli youth.

Kanaka Maoli youth in Hawai'i seem to be turning to substance abuse to escape a world that they may see as holding nothing in the future for them. For many, the troubles do not end when they become adults. Eventually, these youth statistic turn into the prison statistics that I've stated earlier. All of this is a direct result of human rights violation that were committed against our kūpuna [ancestors] and that have placed us, as Kanaka Maoli, at the bottom of society.

As students of Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, we are privileged to be able to fight through a colonial system designed to keep the Native peoples at the bottom. Having been given an opportunity not available for all Kanaka Maoli youth, it is our desire to change these negative statistics in order to make positive changes for youth. We must continue to provide adequate health care for infants that are born into a place of poverty. We also must continue to provide the proper education that is suitable for Indigenous youth. The western education model that is carried out through the U.S., for example, is not the model suitable for Kanaka Maoli students. Since the progression of all Indigenous Peoples is dependent on its

youth, we must ensure that Indigenous youth receive an education that is conducive to their cultural backgrounds.

In closing, we call for the immediate adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and we also ask that Hawai'i be re-listed on the list of non-self governing territories. Hawai'i is undoubtedly being governed by an occupying government, and we have never been given the opportunity to choose our own form of government, with the fundamental principles of self determination.