

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 17th Session, April 16-27, 2018
Agenda Item 12 Future work of the Permanent Forum
Intervention by Nation of Hawai'i, presented by Josiah Vemli Koria

Mahalo Madame Chair and *aloha* to our brothers and sisters around the world. The *pu'uhonua* (place of refuge) model works outside Nation of Hawai'i's sovereign land base. Almost three years ago, community leaders Twinkle Borge and James Pakele consulted with Nation of Hawai'i about how to protect the large encampment of houseless people at the Waianae Boat Harbor, including Hawaiians from the nearby Hawaiian Homestead. The Nation shared the importance of having a legal basis for being on the land and establishing a non-profit to negotiate with the State of Hawai'i. After being inspired by *Pu'uhonua o Waimānalo*, leadership renamed the Harbor as *Pu'uhonua o Wai'anae*. They began implementing the land occupation strategies but expanded the concept of *pu'uhonua* to be a safe space for all community members struggling with various life challenges. Like the Nation, *Pu'uhonua o Wai'anae* provided an 'ohana (family) for people who had been failed by the State of Hawai'i, created a safe, nurturing environment and helped people gain stability.

Nation of Hawai'i modeled peaceful coexistence with the state by helping *Pu'uhonua o Wai'anae* negotiate with the Governor's office and other government officials. Our *pu'uhonua* has been criticized by outsiders who have never visited nor spoken with community members. Working with the media to tell the real story of *Pu'uhonua o Wai'anae* has been essential to reframing public perception and sentiment about our *pu'uhonua*. We are currently in talks with the Governor about finding an alternative plot of land and creating a formal agreement that establishes our legal right to remain on the land.

Pu'uhonua o Wai'anae represents what happens when governments fail and the community takes on the *kuleana* (responsibility) to take care of its people. It is a community-based solution to the pervasive problems of homelessness, poverty and other socioeconomic issues that impact the most vulnerable among us. We care for each other like family, encourage self-sufficiency and personal responsibility and emphasize working together to build a strong community.

I am a Samoan/Tongan/Tokelauan ally to my Hawaiian 'ohana. My family and I created an organization called *Tyrell's Angels* to honor the passing of my nephew Tyrell and to celebrate his life in a positive way by helping youth in need. We work with the kids in the *pu'uhonua* to educate them on multiple cultures, organize fieldtrips to different places to help inspire them to set future goals and provide positive mentorship to help address the difficulties that often come with poverty. I chose to live in the *pu'uhonua* to better understand the difficulties the community faces and became a member of the *Pu'uhonua o Wai'anae* 'ohana that I have grown to love.

The *pu'uhonua* model can be a positive example for communities facing similar hardships. We recommend that the Permanent Forum utilize social media platforms such as Facebook to share success stories of communities like ours who have taken leadership roles in caring for their people without State assistance. Sharing these stories will inform our brothers and sisters worldwide about strategies and solutions and will allow those who cannot attend the Forum in person to have the chance to learn and engage. *Aloha*.