



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

INTERVENTION ON EDUCATION

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‘Ano ‘ai me ke aloha ia kakou 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 Manoa Kamakakuokalani, Center for Hawaiian Studies (KCHS), a place where “education for the nation” is taking place everyday. Aunty Gladys Kamakakuokalani Ainoa Brandt, the person for whom the Center for Hawaiian Studies is named after said that this is a place where Hawaiians can “come to know our ancestors, understand our identity, and perpetuate our culture.”

In Hawai‘i, the lack of an education that is suitable for Kanaka Maoli, the Indigenous People of Hawai‘i is one of the many reasons why our people populate the prisons. While Kanaka Maoli, 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 and 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

¹ Office of Hawaiian Affairs Data Book, 2002.

were Kanaka Maoli. In the same survey 77.2% of 12th graders having also reported to have used 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. 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.

As students of Kamakakuokalani 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 our youth. We must continue to provide the proper education that is suitable for Indigenous youth. Native Hawaiian Public Charter schools are proving to be a successful way of intergrating Indigenous Hawaiian knowledge and western academics. Indigenous Hawaiian students are learning about their past, their identity, and at the same time are being taught the skills to be successful contributors to their families, their communities, and to the nation. At the university level we, as Indigenous

Hawaiian students, ~~are~~ provided the opportunity to learn about our ancestors, our culture, and our history. The Center for Hawaiian Studies provides us with another view of the world other than the Western colonial view that has been taught to us since we first began our education. With and Indigenous view of the world we are empowered to make changes that will better our Indigenous communities. 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. This is one way that I believe, we will keep our people out of the prisons and keep them in and involved with their communities

In closing, we call for the immediate adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples whereby we, as Indigenous Peoples, have the right to our own education systems, which means that we, the Indigenous Peoples, design and implement such an education that is conducive to our Indigenous communities.