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Item #7: Indigenous Languages

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Collective Intervention of the Hawai'i Caucus and Affiliated Organizations

Kamakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, Ka Lāhui Hawai'i, Nā Koa Ikaika a Ka Lāhui Hawai'i, Koani Foundation, Waikīkī Hawaiian Civic Club, the Koani Foundation, Ka Lai Maile Ali'i Hawaiian Civic club, the Living Nation, and Ke Aupuni o Hawai'i.

ʻAe, e nā ʻAumakua o ka pō, e nā ʻaumakua o ke ao, e mālama e hoʻoʻulu I kou  
ʻoukou mau pulapula a mau loa aku! [Oh ancestors of the night, and ancestors of the day,  
preserve, guard and inspire you descendants forever!]

Madame Chair, members of the UN Permanent Forum, my sisters and brothers, aloha!  
My name is Lilikalā Kamelelehiwa. I am a native Hawaiian and have been a professor  
of Hawaiian history, language and culture for 20 years at the Kamakūokalani Center  
for Hawaiian Studies, and today I speak on behalf of the Hawai'i Caucus.

While this intervention is on Indigenous Language, we would first like to thank all of the  
members of the UNPFII, as well as Indigenous delegates, and our non-Native allies for  
their hard work and tremendous efforts in supporting the passage of the United Nations  
Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We especially thank the 143 Nations of  
the world who voted for the passage of this historic declaration.

This document has brought joy to the hearts of Indigenous Peoples everywhere because it  
has given us hope. We hope for a peaceful resolution to our political differences with  
those who have taken our ancestral lands and thus we are teaching the Declaration of  
Rights to the students in our classes. Your good work has changed the world forever in  
support of Indigenous Peoples, and the ancestors have guided you well. Mahalo nui loa!  
[Thank you very much!]

Madame Chair, the Hawai'i Caucus unanimously endorses the UNPFII Reports on  
Indigenous Languages [E/C.19/2008/3] and on Forms of Education of Indigenous  
Children as Crimes Against Humanity? [E/C.19/2008/7] and with regards to those  
Reports we wish to present the following facts:

1. While there are now 400,000 Hawaiians in the world, only about 2%, or 8,000 of  
us, speak our ancestral language, and if we do not make a miracle soon, our  
ancestral will disappear from the face of the earth.

2. ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi, or Hawaiians language, is the voice of the ancestors. Our ancestors have lived in Hawaiʻi for 100 generations, and we can only learn the traditional knowledge of those 100 generations through our language. Great treasures will be lost if our language dies.
3. Although for 30 years, Hawaiian language has been designated an official language of the State of Hawaiʻi, the state has never accorded enough funds to properly support the teaching of Hawaiian Language.
4. Although for 25 years, the Aha Pūnana Leo [Association of Hawaiian Language Nests] has established Hawaiian Immersion preschools, due to lack of state funding, only 3,000 children have become fluent during this time.
5. Although over the past 20 years, we have established Kula Kaiapuni [Hawaiian Immersion Schools], from kindergarten through Secondary School, only 11 of the total of 205 public schools are Hawaiian Immersion schools, and only 2,000 students attend them. These schools lack enough teachers and curriculum.
6. By contrast, in Aotearoa, where the New Zealand government established and funded the Māori Language Commission, as well as funded Māori Language Immersion schools, there are over 1,000 Māori Immersion Schools.
7. Fifteen years ago, when Maori language speakers had dropped to 5%, the government of New Zealand funded Maori language television, and now 35% of Maori are fluent and 75% of them understand Maori.

Madame Chair, with regards to Indigenous Languages, the Hawaiʻi Caucus especially supports implementation of Articles 13 through 16 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as these articles address our rights to revitalizing our languages, establishing educational systems in our ancestral languages, requiring states to honor the dignity of our language and culture, and finally asserting our right to establish media in our own languages.

Therefore Madame chair, the Hawaiʻi Caucus strongly recommends the following:

1. Call upon States to implement a plan of action on Articles 13-16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
2. Recommends that UNESCO and its inter-agency support groups investigate:
  - a) The possible supportive role of the establishment of a Hawaiian Language Commission;
  - b) The effect of increases in Hawaiian Immersion teacher training, and curriculum development;
  - c) The need for the creation of a Hawaiian Language Television station;
  - d) Establishment of a world conference on indigenous languages.
3. Calls for Hawaiʻi to be re-inscribed on the list of non-self governing territories.

Madame Chair, the Hawaiʻi Caucus looks forward to an update on these matters at the next annual meeting of the UNPFII. Thank you.