

Pacific Caucus Statement

United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous

Agenda Item 3

Indigenous Peoples: Development with Culture and Identity: Articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations on the Rights of Indigenous People

Mister Chairman,

My name is Dr. Kimo Armitage; I am an assistant professor at the Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, and I will be speaking on behalf of the Pacific Caucus at this, the 9th Forum of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Specifically, the caucus wishes to contribute to the report presented by Vicky Tauli Corpuz on the international group meeting, which addressed articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples to the Permanent Forum members that was presented yesterday, April 19, 2010.

As noted, the invited delegate from the Pacific Caucus was unable to attend the international expert group meeting. As such, the Pacific Caucus would like to highlight some findings that were discussed, as well as to inform the Permanent Forum of unique problems affecting our oceanic community.

First, modern development in the Pacific has usually not contributed to indigenous well-being. In fact, in most instances, it has been disastrous. Non-sustainable development practices have been invasive, ruining our environmental cycles. All throughout the Pacific, issues of chemical contamination from construction run-off, deforestation, strip mining, damage to reef-eco systems from pollution, possible groundwater contamination from development, vestiges of nuclear contamination, and the rising of sea levels from global warming have placed our landscapes in jeopardy. The Pacific Island states recognize the development models have perpetuated these cycles of dependency. A perspective from the Pacific is people-centered rooted in the nature, especially the Ocean. Indigenous peoples perspectives provide a direction that is holistic and comprehensive. It focuses on equity and equality as much as economy.

For example, it is a commonly believed that the two largest economic generators in Hawai'i are tourism and the American military. Both economic mechanisms have proven disastrous to Hawai'i as development for tourism has displaced the indigenous community; and military training with live fire bombing is destroying fragile ecosystems. Pollution of the land with depleted uranium bullets poisoning the water aquifers is impacting the health of everyone who lives in Hawai'i. A similar fate awaits Guam where 20,000 American troops, and their dependents, are about to retreat from Okinawa to Guam. Their arrival will destroy the reef ecosystem and monopolize the economy of our Indigenous cousins.

The Pacific Caucus, would indeed like to commend the committee for articulating that the dominant development paradigm. Capitalism is dangerous for countries such as ours that have finite resources. However, in Hawai'i, three notable indigenous technologies have contributed and sustained our populations for millennia: irrigated cultivation fields, terraced agricultural food zones, and walled fishponds built around river-mouths. It has been proven that these non-invasive systems contribute to indigenous food sovereignty while maximizing food production using natural landscapes: these knowledge systems fed over one million Hawaiians pre-Western contact. This is in direct opposition to such invasive technologies such as genetically modified foods that threaten the health, and cultural well-being of many Pacific indigenous peoples who have a spiritual relation with plants.

The Pacific Caucus would like to assert that technologies do not only need to be attempted in grand movements. Rather, smaller contributions may also make an impact in reinscribing our knowledge systems back into the current development paradigm. As an example, there is current public policy in Aotearoa, known to the metropole by its less spiritual name of New Zealand, that require urban, public landscaping efforts to utilize indigenous flora. This seemingly small effort contributes greatly to the ecosystem because these plants already understand how to work with other indigenous plants and these plants understand how to contribute to the water cycle. One of the greatest problems all over the Pacific is the onslaught of invasive species that have displaced native species.

Indigenous economies can exist. Indigenous knowledge systems must be the source for the development model. The knowledge must be expressed through indigenous skills in traditional structures. Indigenous research should be increased at the higher education institutions in the Pacific. Through indigenous languages in the Pacific, the education and empowerment activities should be the basis for an indigenous traditional development system. Samoa is currently looking at ways to develop markets for their indigenous medicinal plants. Tahiti is looking for ways incorporate their knowledge of ocean systems to promote fish harvests.

Towards this end, we would like to call upon all universities of the Pacific to follow the example of the University of Hawai'i that has made their Strategic Outcome #1: Making UH an Indigenous Serving University, beginning with the service of Native Hawaiians.

The Pacific Caucus strongly supports and reiterates the recommendations of the international expert group meeting on "Indigenous Peoples: development with culture and identity: articles 3 and 32 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of indigenous Peoples." Specifically, to support and call for the implementation of paragraphs 19 to 60 in the report.

In the upcoming Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Honolulu in 2011, the agenda can integrate, instead of ignore, indigenous development systems. We have one

year to plan in the Pacific region to promote economic exchange between indigenous peoples that builds healthy communities and sustainable societies.

The Pacific Caucus calls on APEC to attend future sessions of the UN PFII but more importantly to make sure an indigenous policy is adopted for the Honolulu summit and included in all future sessions of APEC.

Lastly, in accordance with article 32, we urge all Pacific governments to engage in the process of returning all indigenous lands to indigenous people, such as ceded lands to the Native Hawaiians, Iwi lands to the Maori people, and traditional lands to the people of Rapa Nui. And ask that all nations in the Pacific who wish to be decolonized, such as Hawai'i, be reinscribed on the United Nations' list of Nations to be decolonized.

Thank you.