



**INTERVENTION OF**  
**NA KOA IKAIKA O KA LAHUI HAWAI'I**

**Item #: 6      Topic: Environment**

**Presenter: Le'a Kanehe**

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving Na Koa Ikaika o Ka Lahui Hawai'i this opportunity to address the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Kanaka Maoli, who are the Indigenous Peoples of Hawai'i, like other Indigenous Peoples of the world, understand that the state of our peoples inextricably depends on the state of the environment. Like all Pacific Islanders, our culture is both land and ocean based. Our genealogy informs us that we are the stewards of our homeland because Papahānaumoku, the Earth, is our mother, and Wakea is our Sky Father. The kalo or taro that is our traditional staple food and sustains life is our older sibling. Therefore we have a sacred responsibility to take care of our environment as we would our family, because that is exactly what it is – an embodiment of our elders.

Our organization would like to raise the issue of policies adopted by governments and transnational corporations through land use practices and development initiatives that negatively impact the environment, health and cultural survival of indigenous peoples and their communities. Collectively these official policies and practices are and should be referred to as "environmental racism."

Environmental racism takes many forms. It may result in the selection of native communities as sites for toxic dumping or the storage of nuclear waste. Sometimes it involves the targeting of indigenous lands for developments that contaminate and degrade the land base such as the construction of refuse and sewage treatment facilities or chemical treatment plants. In many cases, environmental racism can be seen in the way development or natural resource extraction proceeds and the manner in which development occurs. Such is the case with strip mining and dams.

Environmental racism is characterized by the degradation and toxification of the environment, by acute health consequences on the indigenous peoples affected, and by the effect which it has on the cultural survival of the indigenous community impacted. In this respect, the Pacific Basin and Hawaiian lands and communities have repeatedly been selected as "national sacrifice areas." These are locations which will become so toxic that they will never be suitable for human use again. In the many islands of the Pacific, indigenous lands and communities have been targeted for nuclear test sites. There is extensive documentation on programs, which the United States has developed to study the effects on the indigenous peoples who were subjected to deliberate nuclear radiation exposure in the Pacific Basin.

In Hawai'i, the effects of environmental racism by our colonizing government are felt primarily on Hawaiian Homelands and lands near large Hawaiian populations, which have been targeted for military and industrial uses, including landfills, sewage treatment plants, public dump sites, incinerators and airports, all which have toxic ramifications on the land and the people. Hawai'i's commercial crop history in sugar cane and pineapple also has contaminated the soil and groundwater in areas throughout our land base.

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On my island of O'ahu, one case in point that reflects the effects of plantations, military and industrial use of Hawaiian trust lands and lands settled by a large population of Native Hawaiians is the Wai'anac Coast. Wai'anac was one of the first places on the island to be settled by early Native Hawaiians, and the population today is about 50% Native Hawaiian. The largest percentage of Native Hawaiian homesteaders live on the Wai'anac Coast. The area that once boasted hundreds of lo'i kalo (taro patches), which produced our staple food, was first converted to ranch lands, followed by commercial sugar plantations. The Coast is now dominated by naval radio transmitting, tracking and magazine facilities and the Makua Military Reservation, where live fire training is currently occurring destroying both the land, threatening endangered native species and damaging cultural and religious sites. In addition, the U.S. Navy improperly disposed of potent cancer-causing PCBs at a minimum of six sites at the Lualualei facilities and has permanently altered the land, making these lands designated no longer suitable for use by the native beneficiaries.

Another important issue to recognize is the issue of biodiversity and the role played by transnational corporations. Wherever indigenous peoples reside, there is a corresponding enclaves of biodiversity. The converse is also true, as the natural enclaves of biodiversity disappear, so do the indigenous peoples who inhabit them. There is also a direct relationship between the loss of cultural diversity and the loss of biodiversity. Historically, initially Indigenous Peoples were removed from our lands to make way for the agricultural, grazing and other needs of the colonizer and settlor populations. Introduced land uses eradicated the biodiversity of the islands impacted and had the same effect on the Hawaiian peoples. For Native Hawaiians, the loss of biodiversity has occurred concurrently with the loss of native rain forest habitats as development encroached into the uplands. For example, the medicinal plants known to our healers are now extinct or very rare. Similarly, numerous native forest bird species whose feathers were traditionally plucked and used in our adornment and chiefly regalia – a practice that is now extremely limited due to the loss of these species. In addition, it becomes harder and harder to obtain the native plants associated with and needed to perpetuate our traditional dance of the hula.

In closing, we would like to make a few recommendations for positive action, which can be pursued by the Permanent Forum as our representatives with the family of nations.

First, we would like to prevail upon you to encourage the observer governments to adopt national policies that recognize that indigenous peoples are rights holders, not just mere stakeholders. Thus, when decisions are made in siting major development and industrial projects, full consultation with the indigenous peoples of the area during environmental assessment is required.

Second, encourage Member States to incorporate the practice of indigenous resource management systems within their national environmental protection schemes.

Finally, we support ongoing efforts for the strengthening of international regulation of transnational corporations, including the establishment of international conventions to regulate the activities of TNCs and the creation of enforceable international standards to regulate these major international actors.

Aloha a mahalo.

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