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**Report of Ka Lahui Hawai'i to the
United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples
Seventeenth Session – July 26-30, 1999**

Agenda Item #5 – Indigenous Peoples and their relationship to land

Mahalo (Thank you) Madame Chair for allowing Ka Lahui Hawai'i the opportunity to testify on the principal theme: indigenous peoples and their relationship to land.

The ancient Hawaiian relationship to land was a genealogical one, with Hawaiians being born as a result of a union between the Earth mother and the Sky father. Thus Hawaiians do not own land, we are born from it. The relationship is described in a cosmogonic genealogy known as the Kumulipo that divides creation into 16 time periods, half in the night and half in the day.

In this cosmogonic description, the world begins with Po, the great female night, and proceeds through her grandchild, the Coral Polyp, unfolding in genealogical sequence from those ancient ancestors to all creatures of the sea and their counterparts upon the Land, animal and plant, each with a male and female essence. The beings of the sea are guarded by their cousins upon the Land.¹ All aspects of nature are divine ancestors of the human like Gods, and finally of their human descendants, the Hawaiian people.

¹ Beckwith, Martha. 1972. The Kumulipo, a Hawaiian Creation Chant. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

For Hawaiians, the most important of these Gods was the Earth mother, Papa-hanau-moku [Papa who gives birth to islands], who mated with the Sky father, Wakea [Great expanse of sky]. From them were born the Hawaiian Islands, the sacred Taro, the main food plant of the Hawaiian people, and finally the first All'i Nui or High Chief, considered a God who walked upon the land. All Hawaiians descend genealogically from that first High Chief named Haloa. By this great cosmogonic genealogy, Hawaiians are the children of the land, and the younger siblings of the Hawaiian islands.

Hawaiians refer to our relationship with land specifically as Malama 'Aina, or caring for and respecting the Land, for Papa-hanau-moku is an original ancestor, and her children the Hawaiian islands, are our elder siblings. The Hawaiian does not desire to conquer the Land, his grandmother and his elder sisters, but rather, desires to take care of her, to cultivate her properly and make her beautiful with neat gardens and careful husbandry. Living in harmony with the land is considered by Hawaiians as one of the highest marks of civilized behavior. In traditional Hawai'i, Land was shared communally and was available for all to live upon and to grow food; the Hawaiian word for land is 'aina, meaning that from which one eats.

Water was also considered sacred, and only diverted from its stream bed for the purposes of making wet land Taro gardens, and not for any other purpose.² Stream water diversion was done in such a way as to leave most of the water running in the stream, and only a portion running into the wet land Taro gardens. After such water had run its course through various gardens, it was returned to the original streambed. Our ancestors recognized that each Land

² Nakuina, Emma. 1893. "Ancient Hawaiian Water Rights and Some of the Customs Pertaining to Them." Hawaiian Annual. Pp. 75-84. Honolulu: Thos. G. Thrum.

needs its share of water, just as humans do. When water is diverted, the Land becomes thirsty; when left to run its natural course, the Land drinks deeply and rejoices.

As you have seen, Land is a Goddess, to be worshipped an ancestor, to be revered and loved, and an elder sibling to be obeyed; she was not property to be owned as is customary in the West. For how could humans own the earth that we did not make? The Gods made the earth. Therefore, in traditional society, Land was not owned, or bought and sold by people, not even by High Chiefs, for how could one buy and sell one's grandmother? Instead, Land was held in trust and administered for the benefit of all.

The survival of Native Hawaiians, our ancestors, and descendants is rooted deeply in the land.³ The life of the land is the spiritual and cultural foundation of Native Hawaiians and our children. Therefore, Ka Lahui Hawai'i needs to reclaim and recover its land base. Land is one of the fundamental elements of sovereignty. The Hawaiian peoples' loss of their traditional lands has resulted in genocide and diaspora. In order to care for its peoples and to ensure their survival, Ka Lahui Hawai'i seeks to establish a National Land Trust to develop housing, medical and educational facilities, and business enterprises.

The National Land Trust shall be comprised of lands currently called:

- 1. Hawaiian Home Lands;**
- 2. State Ceded Lands;**
- 3. Federally held lands; and**
- 4. Private Land Trusts, that currently serve Hawaiians as beneficiaries.**

³ Ka Lahui Hawai'i. 1995. Ho'okupu a Ka Lahui Hawai'i: The Master Plan. Pp. 8-9.

Ka Lahui Hawai'i asserts that the current and immediate needs of the Hawaiian peoples for economic development, housing, education, health, and for the protection of cultural ecosystems and historic and sacred properties requires not less than two (2) million land acres. It is Ka Lahui Hawai'i's position that the National Land Trust of the Hawaiian Nation should eventually encompass all of the traditional lands of the Native Hawaiians and their descendants.

Today, our most fervent prayer is for a return of our lands, so that we may walk in the footsteps of our ancestors, and love and preserve the land as our ancient grandmother.

Thank you Madame Chair.