

Pacific Dialogues: Climate Change and Land Issues

Aloha nui mai kākou, my name is Jane Lokomaika‘ikeakua Au. I am calling in today from the shores of Māeaea, on the island of O‘ahu, in the Hawaiian archipelago. It is an honor to share this space with you all, our Pacific siblings, as we strive to identify strategic measures and create mechanisms for continued dialogue to promote the implementation of our rights.

I currently serve as the Pacific representative for the FWG of the LCIPP under the UNFCCC. I am also the program director for ‘Āina Momona, a native Hawaiian nonprofit dedicated to achieving environmental health and sustainability through restoring social justice and de-occupying Hawaiian lands.

I am here today to discuss climate change and land issues in Hawai‘i. As a small island community, Native Hawaiians face several challenges in connection to climate change and land. Sea-level rise, increased ocean temperatures, coastal erosion, coral bleaching, amplified storms and unpredictable weather patterns, are all seen and felt regularly in our islands as the devastating effects of the climate crisis persist. These climate matters are joined by land issues such as overdevelopment, increased land privatization, the military industrial complex, and a lack of local food production, which keeps Hawai‘i dependent on outside shipments for over 90% of our needed goods. In more ways than one, we are an extremely vulnerable community. With the COVID-19 pandemic wreaking havoc across the U.S., The “state” of Hawai‘i has continued to prioritize the extractive tourism industry as Hawai‘i’s main economic driver, keeping our land, resources and people in a position of servitude. White supremacy, systematic racism, and capitalism are all colonial byproducts that regularly contribute to and intensify these issues, which are systematic and structural. Their damaging effects on our people and land are apparent and well understood by those upholding them.

As an indigenous community, we face several challenges that must be addressed in order to protect the integrity of our land, communities, and the resources therein. Many, if not all of these issues are a direct result of the United States’ illegal occupation of our ancestral lands and the continued colonization of our people. Our historical lack of rights to self-determination and self-governance have led to extreme loss of land and access to our natural and cultural resources. The colonial education, food, health, economic, and land management systems we have been left with further increase our marginalization in our homelands and are major contributors to climate change and the degradation of our community’s well-being. They are not systems built for us, as the Native community, to participate in, contribute to, or thrive in, but are designed for us to disappear into, with no say. When it comes to land and the protection of our natural resources, our community is continually fighting for the basic rights required to be decision-makers and have an impactful say when it comes to our land and its future.

For generations we have watched our ‘āina be battered and mismanaged by our colonizers for their profit. Much of this damage is irreparable. Streams have been diverted and aquifers are dried up. Lands are eroded and grossly overdeveloped. Pristine waters and reef systems are constantly threatened, and as the climate crisis continues, the loss of our natural and cultural resources is hugely exacerbated. While we have a strong community vision for a sustainable future, and a wealth of ancestral knowledge to draw solutions from, we are rarely given opportunity to act, as foreign power and economic structures continue to prevail, telling us- the indigenous people of this place, what rights we have to live and die on a land that is

rightfully our own. The loss of our rights and lack of opportunity towards self-determination have been the main contributors to climate and land issues in Hawai‘i, the wider Pacific.

As such, we must work to dismantle the structures that have forcefully removed our rights, and defund the mechanisms that disconnect us from the stewardship of our lands. We need to restore the societal and cultural importance of non-colonial, non-capitalistic systems, and move them to the forefront of our governance structures. Current power-holders in Hawai‘i must recognize that Indigenous-centered knowledge systems, resource management strategies, methodologies, research and education are vital to building climate change resiliency. The place-based knowledge we have to offer must be a driving force for Hawai‘i’s future, and we need to ensure that as native descendants of our land, we explicitly contribute to the decision-making processes at all levels of federal, provincial, state, territorial, and municipal governments. A sustainable future, is an anti-colonial future. By re-centering and restoring our rights, we can create a more just, sustainable future for all. Mahalo.