

STATEMENT OF INDIGENOUS KAHU‘ĀINA GUARDIANS OF SACRED LANDS

2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress

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Aloha Kākou. Aloha ‘Āina : Love and respect for lands and nature. As indigenous guardians of the sacred lands, oceans, waters and air of our Mother Earth, from the shores of Kanaloa Kaho‘olawe to the peak of Mauna A Wākea in Hawai‘i; Baram River in Borneo; Papua New Guinea; Mongolia; the Altai Republic of Russia; Kyrgyzstan; Republic of Buryatia (Russia); Benin; Kenya; U‘wa Nation (Colombia); Kichwa People of Sarayaku (Ecuador); and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe (U.S.), we have gathered in Honolulu, Hawai‘i for the 2016 World Conservation Congress (WCC) of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

For generations, our indigenous cultures have protected the lands, oceans, waters and air, which are sacred. Together, we affirm that the health and dignity of the sacred places of Mother Earth are essential to sustaining the biodiversity and health of the lands, oceans, waters and air of our planet and the well-being of humanity. Sacred lands enable the next generations to connect, identify with and carry on our ancestral cultures, traditions, ceremonies and spirituality.

In joining together for this gathering in Hawai‘i, we recognize that we share common values for Peace and for the well-being of our Mother Earth and our cultures:

Peace

Peace is based on mutual respect, reciprocity and tolerance, and is fundamental for our cultures and biodiversity to thrive. All cultures should respect indigenous cultures and our sacred natural sites and territories, just as we respect the cultures and religions around us. The world should honor our sacred natural sites as they do mosques, churches and all holy places.

Mother Earth

Mother Earth is manifested in various shapes of relief, landscapes, waters, airflows, and the richness of flora and fauna, including the human species. Mother Earth constitutes a holistic living being. Sacred landscapes and their natural features must be protected and free from extraction to maintain the balance of all life on Mother Earth and our global climate. Water is life. Water is sacred. Nothing exists without water. Rain is essential for the vitality of all life. Mountains are connected to traditions and cultures and are interdependent, ensuring the existence of life and the future. All mountains of the world are connected. Oceans are the source of life on Mother Earth and marine life requires healthy oceans. Living Forests “Kawsak Sacha” are the sacred spaces where all beings of the forest live, from the smallest to the largest and the most supreme beings. We acknowledge that the stewardship and tenure of indigenous peoples over our ancestral lands sustains the balance of life through a respectful relationship with nature and her cycles.

Culture

Traditional Indigenous cultures, which are based on holistic knowledge and relational understanding of the world, recognize the special role of sacred sites, sacred nomadic migration routes, pilgrimage routes, sacred waters, sacred rains, sacred forests, sacred plants and animals, sacred mountains, and sacred oceans as nodal points, responsible for the harmonious and healthy functioning of Mother Earth. It is our duty and our obligation as indigenous peoples to honor and care for lands, oceans, waters and air with due diligence and through prayer and ceremony. When we take care of nature, nature takes care of us in a reciprocal, respectful relationship. Our ancestral lands are our identity and culture. Indigenous languages are the medium for the transfer of and connection with ancestral knowledge about sacred places and the stewardship of Mother Earth.

Industrial activities in all their manifestations — mining, oil and gas extraction, dams, logging, corporate agricultural expansion, industrial-scale wind and solar power, and other extractive practices — have caused immense pain and suffering through the irreversible loss of biocultural diversity, human and other forms of life, ancestral lands, culture and tradition, knowledge, unique habitats and ecosystems, livelihoods, and heritage. The compounded impacts of these activities result in multi-generational psychological and emotional trauma for indigenous communities and profoundly impact nature.

Going beyond the IUCN definition of sacred natural sites as “areas of land or water having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities,” we would add that we have a cultural obligation to perform ceremonies and to maintain a spiritual relationship with sacred sites that have the capacity to change the physical nature of Mother Earth and to heal and enhance biodiversity.

We, the indigenous peoples of nations around the world, have a responsibility to maintain our ancestral ways of protecting our sacred sites, landscapes, seascapes and their interconnectedness and linkages and to protect them from all forms of extractive industries, major infrastructure developments and destruction. Drawing upon what we have learned of the practice of aloha ‘āina for the last 40 years to protect and heal the sacred island of Kanaloa Kaho‘olawe in Hawai‘i, we call attention to the need for supportive policies and actions to protect special places that are threatened, to fulfill our responsibility to future generations. Such threats in our own homelands include:

- sacred migratory routes and pilgrimage trails that cross borders (i.e. local and international borders);
- mining at the headwaters of major rivers in Papua New Guinea and deep sea mining off our coasts;
- deforestation through logging and corporate agricultural expansion in Borneo’s Baram River Basin;
- inaccessibility to the sacred grounds of Forole Mountain across the border between Kenya and Ethiopia;
- U.S. government plans to raise the height of Shasta Dam in California, and failure to include the Winnemem Wintu Tribe in developing a plan to restore salmon runs;
- plans to construct a Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna A Wakea and military training on Hawaiian lands;
- sacred natural sites in Benin that are threatened by land-grabbing by various interests;
- Mt. Zizuma (El Cocuy National Park in Colombia) is a sacred site within U'wa territory and the U'wa Nation's norms, such as not walking on the snow out of respect and recognition of its cultural value should be recognized and respected; and
- the concession on the part of the Ecuadorian government of oil and mining blocks within indigenous territories of the South-Central Amazon.

We ask all gathered at the 2016 IUCN World Conservation Congress to recognize the need to protect indigenous peoples, sacred sites and ancestral territories in your homelands and support their obligation and responsibility in safeguarding these lands from damage and desecration for generations to come.

We, the guardians and our allies, support Motion 26, which links the universal value of World Heritage Sites, protected areas, sacred natural sites and conserved territories. This motion affirms that these places should be permanent “No Go Areas” for mining and other damaging extractive industries.

We believe that the time has come for the global community to recognize sacred sites and those who provide stewardship and guardianship over these terrestrial and marine sites to protect them from harm. Sacred natural sites are where nature and culture meet in the landscapes and seascapes of the world.

We encourage each member state and member organizations of IUCN to engage diligently in your cooperation with site guardians and their communities.

We call upon the government representatives to work with indigenous traditional practitioners to generate national legal protection and appropriate systems of management and governance for sacred natural sites and territories, and to enhance their role in contributing to Aichi Biodiversity Target 11.

We propose that the IUCN Secretariat and Commissions work further with indigenous traditional practitioners and elders to develop a multilateral framework, norms and standards for the recognition, site connectivity and conservation of sacred natural sites and territories.

We propose that IUCN work with indigenous traditional practitioners and elders to develop a special category of protection for indigenous sacred natural sites and territories.