

PROTECTION & PRESERVATION OF MAUNAKEA. SOCIAL WORK STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY.

Background Significance

Kānaka Maoli, nā ‘Ōiwi, or Native Hawaiians are the Indigenous people of Ka Pae ‘Āina—the Hawaiian Archipelago. For many Kānaka Maoli, Maunakea represents a oneness and connection to the natural and spiritual worlds-- a sacred place and the zenith of ancestral ties to creation (Saks,2019):

The upper regions, Wao Akua, are the realms of the Akua (creator) and the summit is a temple of the Supreme Being in not only Hawaiian culture but also in many histories throughout Polynesia. It is the home of Nā Akua (divine deities) and Nā ‘Aumākua’(divine ancestors), as well as the meeting place of Wākea, the Sky Father and Papahānaumoku, the Earth Mother---progenitors of the Hawaiian people. It is also both a burial ground and the embodiment of ancestors that include Ali‘i and Kahuna (high ranking chiefs and priests). Modern Native Hawaiians continue to regard Maunakea with reverence and many cultural and religious practices are still performed there. In addition to sacred importance, the summit is home to nearly a hundred archaeological sites and many traditional cultural properties eligible to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Currently, there is significant controversy surrounding the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Maunakea. This controversy highlights the struggle of an Indigenous People to preserve their sacred sites from desecration and ensure their participation in current land use issues. Kānaka Maoli leaders and those who oppose TMT construction emphasize that they are not “anti-science”. Rather, they contest the fact that nā Kānaka Maoli were insufficiently consulted before Maunakea was chosen as the TMT site. Further, they stress that building the TMT on Maunakea comes with serious environmental risks. According to the 2010 environmental impact statement, the cumulative impact of the TMT together with the 13 other telescopes already on Maunakea potentiate a profoundly negative impact on the geology and animal inhabitants of the area. Importantly, the construction of the TMT would disrupt traditional spiritual and cultural practices of Kānaka Maoli (Saks,2019).

Kia’i (guardians, protectors) of Maunakea stand strong. However, protection of the sacred mountain raises painful issues of systemic dispossession, inter-generational marginalization, and discrimination. In July 2019, 34 kūpuna (elders) were arrested for peaceful obstruction of the government road leading to the site of TMT construction (Zaveri, 2019). Younger protectors chanted and cried as kūpuna were carried or taken away in wheelchairs. These arrests underscored the power of the state government to enforce western property rights while at the same time disrespecting traditional wisdom keepers. To those protecting Maunakea, these encounters confirmed that social justice issues cannot be resolved by majority laws and rules but rather, require community advocates and purposeful, non-violent civil disobedience. Living with the ongoing threat of forceful removal of kia’i has resulted in chronic strain. Informal reports suggest that kia’i experience hypervigilance, disruption of routine sleep patterns, as well as other manifestations of what might be considered secondary traumatic stress (Figley, 2013). Supportive counselling and preventive health education are recognized as helpful in mitigating such stress.

Relevance to Social Work

The NASW-Hawai’i Chapter has a history of upholding the rights of Kānaka Maoli and other Indigenous Peoples. Through the national NASW Delegate Assembly, the Hawai’i Chapter has led social work efforts to develop and pass policy-relevant statements on the sovereignty and health of Indigenous Peoples (NASW, 2009). These statements acknowledge Indigenous Peoples’ lived experience of colonization, attacks on Indigenous rights and sovereignty, loss of land, and pernicious, systematic efforts of U.S. federal and state governing bodies to marginalize and/or erase Indigenous history, ways of knowing, language, and culture.

The NASW policy statement on “Sovereignty and the Health of Indigenous Peoples” (2009) recognizes that spiritual, physical, social, and emotional health diminishes with infringement of Indigenous rights. Further, the ***NASW Code of Ethics*** (2017) upholds the cardinal principle of social justice for all. At a global level, the ***Social Work Health Inequalities Network*** (SWHIN) calls Indigenous social work scholars, practitioners, and

allies to resist personal/professional complicity with neo-colonialism and cultural genocide by proxy. In other words, taking a neutral stance *defacto* supports the status quo (Bywaters, Featherstone, & Morris, 2019; Ka'opua, Friedman, Duncombe, Mataira, & Bywaters, 2019; Morelli, Mataira, & Kaulukukui, 2013; Nakaoka, Ka'opua, & Ono, in press).

This statement of solidarity is intended to inform social work actions that strengthen protection/preservation of Maunakea and that mālama (care for) *kia'i* (guardians, protectors) and *kōkua* (supporters).

NASW-Hawai'i Chapter: Recommendations

Chapter leadership together with Kānaka Maoli social workers recognize that many social workers are in support of Maunakea protection/preservation. We acknowledge that many social workers have visited Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu Maunakea and while there, have observed/practiced Aloha 'Āina (deep love and care for land all that lives) and Kapu Aloha (act only with kindness, love, and empathy).

To support the protection/preservation of Maunakea and the community that gathers there, the NASW-Hawai'i Chapter recommends five key actions:

- 1) **Stay current** on this Indigenous issue of social justice; learn more through continuing education offerings and discussions.
- 2) **Visit Maunakea** if possible. While there, observe Aloha 'Āina and Kapu Aloha at all times.
- 3) **Provide ongoing support of *kia'i*** through delivering and/or participating in educational offerings convened at Pu'uhonua o Pu'uhuluhulu o Maunakea, see: <https://www.puuhuluhulu.com/>
- 4) **Volunteer** to serve as a telephone support responder for *kia'i*, *kōkua*, and 'ohana. For information, contact: lkaopua@hawaii.edu
- 5) **Use social work values, knowledge, and skills** to work collaboratively with other groups and individuals who ally with protection and preservation of Maunakea.

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This statement is authored by NASW-HI Chapter members: LS Ka'opua, P Lee, J Oliveira-Payton, & R Takeuchi. Questions and discussion are encouraged. A list of those social workers and allies endorsing this statement follows. The list is continuously updated by the NASW-HI Chapter.

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SOCIAL WORK STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY.

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