Letter in Strong Opposition to Deep Sea Mining

Maui Nui Makai Network

July 12, 2023

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There is a culture of the deep seas.

O ke au i kahuli wela ka honua
O ke au i kahuli lole ka lani
O ke au i kuka’iaka ka la
E ho’omalama i ka malama
O ke au o Makali’i ka po
O ka walewale ho’okumu honua ia
O ke kumu o ka lipo, i lipo ai
O ke kumu o ka Po, i po ai
O ka lipolipo, o ka lipolipo
O ka lipo o ka la, o ka lipo o ka po
Po wale ho’i
Hanau ka po
Hanau Kumulipo i ka po, he kane
Hanau Po’ele i ka po, he wahine
Hanau ka ‘Uku-ko’ako’a, hanau kana, he ‘Ako’ako’a, puka

At the time when the earth became hot
At the time when the heavens turned about
At the time when the sun was darkened
To cause the moon to shine
The time of the rise of the Pleiades
The slime, this was the source of the earth
The source of the darkness that made darkness
The source of the night that made night
The intense darkness, the deep darkness
Darkness of the sun, darkness of the night
Nothing but night
The night gave birth
Born was Kumulipo in the night, a male
Born was Po’ele in the night, a female
Born was the coral polyp, born was the coral, came forth…

- Excerpt from the Kumulipo, Hawaiian Creation Chant

The Kumulipo is the Hawaiian creation chant, consisting of 2,000 lines that explain the beginning genealogy of all creatures. The Kumulipo begins with cosmic darkness. The first lines of the chant tells us that we come from the deep seas, created from the “walewale”, synonymous with the primordial sludges of the ocean bottom. From the deepest depths, all of the creatures that come up through the vertical water column into nearshore waters, the lands, hills and the mountain, and even taking flight into the sky - are all part of our creation genealogy. And we as a people don’t come into being until much much later in the creation of this Honua, or shared island Earth. When we humans are ushered in, we have an inheritance of caring for those elders that precede us.

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) has issued 19 licenses for mining exploration in the Clarion-Clipperton Zone - an area of the Pacific Ocean beginning 500 miles south of Hawaii’, covering 1.7 million square miles stretching all the way to Mexico. To mine from the seafloor is to enter the realm of our creation itself. If you intrude into this sacred place of creation, this is an ultimate kind of destruction with no known timeline of recovery and should not occur. That “walewale” will never return. These observations are backed by science. To cite one study, Thiel et al found that after 7 years following deep sea mining, sediment-dwelling animals only returned to less than 15% of pre-disturbance levels (Thiel et al 2001).

When Queen Lili’uokalani, our last reigning queen, was overthrown in ‘Iolani Palace, one of the last things she chose to do was translate the Kumulipo into English. Our queen, in the darkest hours of her life where her nation and her kingdom had just been taken from her, chose to do this while imprisoned in her room - saying perhaps there will be a need for this in the future - scientists and genealogists might want to take a look at this. The Kumulipo provides a connection to where we come from.
It's now been 130 years since the translation of the Kumulipo and the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom as a sovereign nation, but the absence from the international arena means Hawai‘i has never been seated at the table where these rules and regulations have been made by nation states - where nations created the Law of the High Seas and decided they could draw lines across the ocean and separate us all into authorities and boundaries. It’s clear to us as indigenous Hawaiians, there’s no line across the ocean that separates us. In our mind, there is no division of the seas. The animals of the sea don’t see a boundary any more than we humans see a boundary. With the proximity of the Hawaiian Islands to the proposed mining zone, it would be foolish to only be concerned with our boundary and to think that everything on the other side of that boundary will have no impact on us.

We have a great ocean of which we are related to and come from and care for. And that’s our home.

I challenge the perception that culture can only be tangible artifacts. When we travel across the seas at great distances, we are intimate with observation and knowing the currents. We know the waves and their movements, the clouds and the weather. We know the resources that are in the deep seas. We are the culture of the people of the deep sea and our culture is intangible. The ocean is everything to us. It’s what we depend upon for our sustenance. It’s unacceptable to proceed with activities that will disrupt creations related to the deep sea, ultimately disrupting the food chain which now we have subsisted on for millenia. In those conversations of mining, there’s no consideration that we come from this space. It’s about minerals. It’s about resources. It’s about extraction with no regard for culture. It’s that that bothers me about this process of deep sea mining.

There is a culture of the deep seas. I want to be the voice of our ancestors. I am here to say we come from this place. This is our home. And you are now intruding upon it. We strongly oppose any form of deep sea mining to protect our culture, our home, our ocean, and our island Earth.

Mahalo,

[Signature]

Solomon Kaho’ohalahala,
On behalf of the Maui Nui Makai Network
Former Hawai‘i State Representative, indigenous activist and seventh generation resident of the island of Lāna‘i