

Statement of State Representative Mina Morita
Lawai International Center – Pilgrimage for Compassion 2009
July 19, 2009

Ano ai me ke aloha kakou, e na hulu manu like ole. Greetings, with aloha, among all of us, birds of many feathers. I learned this greeting from Puanani Burgess, a community builder and poet from Waianae. She learned this formal greeting from Pilahi Paki. Puanani, who is also a Buddhist priest, told me she thought that this greeting demonstrates the Hawaiian mindset perfectly. The kaona, or hidden meaning, of this formal greeting is that even though we may look different we are all the same. And, scientifically, this is true. Through the human genome project we now know that 99.9% of humans are genetically the same but unfortunately, most conflicts focus on our differences be it race, gender or religion.

Respect for nature, universal human rights and a culture of peace. These are the kind of values we share and these values can be embodied in a single word, Aloha. Aloha is what brings us together today. Aloha guides Lynn Muramoto and is the foundation of Lawai International Center. It is Aloha that allows this puu honua, this place of refuge, to transcend through generations despite our differences be it race, gender or religion.

Today, I want to share two messages of aloha from kupuna who have departed this life. Almost two generations have gone by since Pilahi Paki and the Reverend Abraham Akaka shared their wisdom.

In 1970 in Honolulu, at the Governor's Conference on the Year 2000, Pilahi Paki spoke spontaneously to a room filled with community, educational and legislative leaders. Eloquently and simply, she told them that aloha, her ancestral legacy is meant to be shared.

She said, "Aloha is the coordination of mind and heart . . . it's within the individual. It brings you down to yourself. You must think and emote good feelings to others." Prophetically, Kupuna Paki told the attendees "...in the next millennium, the world will turn to Hawai`i in its search for world peace because Hawai`i has the key...and that key is ALOHA."

Kupuna Paki went on to say, "Aloha means mutual regard and affection and extends warmth in caring with no obligation in return. Aloha is the essence of relationships in which each person is important to every other person for collective existence. Aloha means to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen and to know the unknowable."

Pilahi Pahi passed away in 1985; however, her legacy still exists. Acting upon her message, the "Aloha Spirit" law was passed in 1986. You can hear Pilahi Pahi recite her unuhi laula loa at www.lifeintheseislands.com.

2009 is the 50th anniversary of Hawaii's statehood. One of the most powerful messages to Hawaii's residents came the day after the Statehood bill passed the U.S. Senate. On March 13, 1959, the Reverend Abraham Akaka delivered his famous Hawaii statehood sermon entitled "Aloha Ke Akua". I want to share with you portions of Kahu's sermon:

The fears Hawaii may have are to be met by men and women who are living witnesses of what we really are in Hawaii, of the spirit of Aloha, men and women who can help unlock the doors to the future by the guidance and grace of God.

This kind of self-affirmation is the need of the hour. And we can affirm our being, as the Aloha State, by full participation in our nation and in our world. For any collective anxiety, the answer is collective courage. And the ground of that courage is God.

We do not understand the meaning of Aloha until we realize its foundation in the power of God at work in the world. Since the coming of our missionaries in 1820, the name for God to our people has been Aloha. One of the first sentences I learned from my mother in my childhood was this from Holy Scripture: "Aloha ke Akua" - in other words, "God is Aloha." Aloha is the power of God seeking to unite what is separated in the world - the power that unites heart with heart, soul with soul, life with life, culture with culture, race with race, nation with nation. Aloha is the power that can reunite when a quarrel has brought separation; aloha is the power that reunites a man with himself when he has become separated from the image of God within.

Aloha consists of this new attitude of heart, above negativism, above legalism. It is the unconditional desire to promote the true good of other people in a friendly spirit, out of a sense of kinship. Aloha seeks to do good, with no conditions attached. We do not do good only to those who do good to us. One of the sweetest things about the love of God, about Aloha, is that it welcomes the stranger and seeks his good. A person who has the spirit of Aloha loves even when the love is not returned. And such is the love of God.

Aloha does not exploit a people or keep them in ignorance and subservience. Rather, it shares the sorrows and joys of people; it seeks to promote the true good of others.

Today, one of the deepest needs of mankind is the need to feel a sense of kinship one with another. Truly all mankind belongs together from the beginning all mankind has been called into being nourished [and] watched over by the love of God. So that the real Golden Rule is Aloha. This is the way of life we shall affirm.

Let us affirm [for]ever what we really are - for Aloha is the spirit of God at work in you and in me and in the world, uniting what is separated, overcoming darkness and death, bringing new light and life to all who sit in the darkness of fear, guiding the feet of mankind into the way of peace.

This is the guidance Lynn has relied on in the establishment of the Lawai International Center. She and members of the Lawai International Center volunteer ohana have a tremendous kuleana (responsibility) to malama (protect and perpetuate) this special puu honua, so that the seeds of peace may be planted with each step along the hillside and blossom when we leave this sanctuary to live and share aloha.

However, this work cannot be done by the Center and its volunteers alone. So I hope each of you will give generously not only of your time but by also contributing financially to help establish this puu honua, this special place of refuge, this special place of aloha.