

Written Direct Testimony of Leina'ala Sleightholm

My name is J. Leina'ala Sleightholm. I come from the 'ohana Keli'ipio, and Kuamo'o. I am a kanaka 'oiwi and can trace my genealogy back to the Battle of Kuamo'o in 1819. I am a 42 year old wife, and mother of 6 children of which I birthed 5. I was born in Wahiawa, O'ahu and moved to Pahoia, Moku o Keawe in 1978 with my parents, and younger sister. At the age of five, we moved to the wahi of Keahuolu where my father was the caretaker. In 1988 we moved to Ka'awaloa, Kona Hema where my parents remain today. I currently reside in Waikoloa, Kohala Hema, Moku o Keawe.

On October 7, 2014 I was moved to go to the mauna for the purpose of protecting my mountain from the desecration of the groundbreaking ceremony for the proposed Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT). I stood alongside my mother, and dozens of other people chanting, praying, and singing while armed police officers approached. As I stood there chanting at the guardrail, I saw a female police officer remove a handful of zipties from her back pocket, and I immediately was overcome with a sadness so deep and profound, and one that I had never felt before but will come to be very familiar with it in the coming months. I looked at my mother with tears rolling down my cheeks and whispered, "why does it have to come to this". Those were the only words I could form for the emotional and spiritual sadness I was feeling at that time, as I looked around to see kanaka 'oiwi from near and far standing together in love, and prayer for our mauna regardless of the threats that stood across the street. It was that day where my entire world shifted. The mauna called, and I answered. After that day, I came home and passed out on the living room floor for about 5 hours, and when I woke up, I went to take a shower and couldn't bring myself to wash the mauna dirt from my hair that night and finally did the next evening. It took me at least two weeks to recover from the feelings which I couldn't quite identify at that time, but it felt as if my physical body was at home, but my spirit was still on the mauna. Over the course of those two weeks, I had heard similar experiences and feelings from other people who were there. This would be the first "cut" I would endure over the course of the next two years.

On the evening of March 25, 2015 I again was guided by my kupuna to go to the mauna, where I and a few others would hold vigil for the next 3-5 days

until hundreds began to arrive. During the duration of that time, I was in constant high alert that the mountain which had called me, which was also my church, and I regard as my kupuna was in jeopardy of being harmed by threatened construction work. Each day my fear became more and more intense. The only way to describe it in this human realm is as if my grandmother was in danger of her life. "This would be the next 3-5 cuts"

April 2, 2015 myself and many others, grounded deeply in pule, made our pilgrimage to the summit and stood arm in arm chanting, praying as police and DOCARE officers began to bare down on us, ripping our arms apart from each other, while one forcefully grabbed each of our heads pulling it to his to exchange ha (life force/breath), against our will. I remember my arms being twisted behind my back and ziptied, all the while I continued to chant for the mauna, looking at each officer's face and recognizing that so many of them were kanaka too, some were childhood classmates, and others, family friends. I couldn't process all that happened that day, and felt spiritually numb as we were driven down the mountain in the police vehicle to the Hilo cellblock. What I did know is that I felt something in the very core of my being shift. From

that day, and for the next three weeks I would remain close to home, barely able to get myself out of the house. I felt very vulnerable, tearful, and even unable to watch videos or see pictures of the arrests without breaking down in tears, literally immobilizing me. More than a year later, there are a few videos documenting that day that I haven't seen until just recently, and my reaction is the same, and I'm jolted back to that day with my arms being ripped from my mother's, and brother Elston's. Looking into the eyes of my own people carrying guns on their sides, and hands full of zipties hearing the chilling cries of our people which hauntingly replays in my mind till today, 'AUE...'AUE...and seeing the shocked and frightened faces many of which were dirt streaked from tears. "Cut, cut, cut, cut, cut, cut".

On the evening of September 08, 2015 I was guided to be on the mauna again in ceremony, and to pule for our brothers who were holding vigil, for the continued protection of the mauna, and to mahalo our Akua, 'aumakua, kupuna, and 'ohana. My ceremony began at Pu'uhuluhulu before going up to Hale Pohaku, where myself, my hula sisters, and my mother continued in protocols of ceremony throughout the evening into the early morning hours. After taking some time to malama ourselves, we joined hands in a tight

circle, and I felt my body begin to tremble from the very cellular level of my being to the top of my head, down to the bottoms of my feet. It was not because I was cold, and from there I entered a different state, and I only remember seeing flashes of light, and the next thing I knew, I felt myself being yanked very forcefully, then realizing I had actually been kneeling on the ground, my arms again twisted behind my back with more force than before and ziptied. As I stood next to the police vehicle, a chant loudly bursted forth from my na'au, "E IHO ANA O LUNA, E PI'I ANA O LALO, E HUI ANA NA MOKU E KU ANA KA PAIA!!" As I looked on at the chaotic scene up on the hillside next to Hale Kukia'imauna where we had just been hand in hand in prayer. All I saw was a tangled confusion of officers, dust, lights from flashlights darting around, and my sisters and mother one by one being restrained, and walked down to where I was being led into the paddy wagon. We were removed from the mountain, processed at the Hilo cellblock, fingerprinted, mugshots taken, and released on bail to our awaiting families outside. I don't know how long it was, but I again, like I had felt in April, didn't want to leave the house, when and if I could even get myself out of bed I would only go anywhere with my husband, and only to see very close friends or family. I felt like I was in a dream, walking around with my eyes open but like I was floating, extremely tearful, on edge, and it felt like I was floating in the air with a very thin string connecting me to the ground...like a leaf aimlessly blowing in the wind. Like the last time, I couldn't, and still cannot watch videos of that night without breaking down in heaving cries. I watch in those videos, my mother, the grandmother of my children roughed up, having her arm twisted so hard her shoulder hurt, ziptied and arrested like a criminal while holding hands in a circle of wahine, while praying. Our only weapon was ceremony. The video of our arrests plastered on the morning news....again we were portrayed like criminals. (This would be the deepest cut that ultimately would take longer to heal)

I stand here today, unrecognizable from who I was just a couple of years ago. The traumas inflicted on me all too often shows in my eyes, and the fake smile I wear. So throughout my recount of events I end with "cuts" because I was urged by a close friend to read a blog that spoke of the trauma we have endured for generations and it's likened to cuts. Much like the supporters of the proposed TMT project often say, "what difference does one more telescope

make? There's already so many up there it's not like the mountain hasn't already been desecrated. One more won't make a difference." What they fail to see, like with me, each cut, each time an earthmoving machine disturbs another stone, we had a hundred cuts before that are still unhealed and this one, the last one they say, WILL be the final cut which would be the finishing slice.