Re: The protection of Mauna Kea as a cultural and natural resource

This statement is being made by physicians, scientists, and cultural practitioners who aloha ‘āina and who happen to be leaders of the Department of Native Hawaiian Health in the John A. Burns School of Medicine of the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. However, we are not making this statement in our capacity as faculty of the university nor is this an official statement of the university.

In 2003, the Department of Native Hawaiian Health was established at University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Its mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiians) by increasing the cadre of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and other health professionals and scientists working toward health equity for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi through health care services and scientific research and through community engagement and empowerment. In meeting our mission, we embrace biomedical and behavioral sciences and Kānaka ‘Ōiwi cultural knowledge and tradition. We value science and its potential in improving the lives of all people and we value our Kanaka ‘Ōiwi culture and its offering of continuity and Mauli Ola (optimal and holistic health and wellbeing) for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi.

The movement to protect Mauna Kea (aka, Mauna a Wākea) by concerned Kānaka ‘Ōiwi is their ancestral kuleana (responsibility) to mālama ‘āina (land stewardship) and means of ensuring Mauli Ola. Cultural protection and revitalization of historical and sacred places are important social and cultural determinants of Mauli Ola for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi. It is as important to Mauli Ola as access to safe and well-resourced neighborhoods, excellent education, healthy food options, physical activity opportunities, and quality health care.

Coming from a tradition of seafarers and skilled navigators, who looked up to the heavens and night skies for knowledge and guidance, Kānaka ‘Ōiwi can appreciate astronomy’s quest to understand the mysteries of the universe and our collective existence in, and connection to, this universe. Kānaka ‘Ōiwi also appreciate and holdfast to cultural knowledge, traditions, and wahi pana (scared places) that also explain our existence in, and connection to, this place we call Hawai‘i.

In respect for both traditions, astronomy and Kānaka ‘Ōiwi, the leadership of the Department of Native Hawaiian Health calls for an extended moratorium until a balanced resolution between the astronomy and Kānaka ‘Ōiwi community is achieved. And may it be done with inspiration from the words of our ancestors, ‘A’ohe pau ka ‘ike i ka hālau ho’okahi (not all knowledge is acquired through one school).