

20 September, 2020

To: Commissioners of the 13th FestPac
From: Vilsoni Hereniko
Re: Testimony for meeting on 22 September, 2020

I wish to thank the Commissioners for inviting testimonies from the general public for consideration. Here's one from me:

The arts and cultures of Oceania has been my main interest and I have written about them, including the Festival of Pacific Arts, over my 40 years experience as an educator at the University of the South Pacific (10 years) and the University of Hawai'i (30years). My first festival was in 1972, when Fiji hosted the first. I was still a high school student then, but the experience is etched in my memory. I attended four others, and was a participant in one of them, when my film "The Land Has Eyes" screened at the one held in Palau and I was part of the Fiji delegation. As you can imagine, I am more than pleased that Hawai'i will be hosting the 13th festival in 2024.

After listening to the deliberations at the last meeting, I wanted to bring this idea for your consideration. It is inspired by the pandemic, which has thrown into stark relief the need for the residents of Hawai'i to the past to inform the future, especially in the area of food security.

Imagine that at the 13th Festival, we make **kalo, niu, and ulu** a central focus, from which other aspects of arts and cultures radiate. As well as the old, we encourage the creation of new songs, new choreographies and dances, new plays, new films, new artworks, etc. and we celebrate the importance of these three foods to sustain us now and into the future.

For example, in the case of niu, we encourage carvings from the trunks of niu, the weaving of baskets, fans and hats from its coconut fronds, the making of sennit/cordage, jewelry from the coconut shell, aloha shirt designs, slam poetry etc. inspired by niu, and more. In the case of kalo, we showcase how to make poi and we tell of the origin of taro as an older sibling and how connected Hawaiians were and are to the land, and we hold seminars on the different kinds of taro and their uses, we empower and honor the folks who have maintained our connections to the land, we show films about taro, and so on. We can do the same thing with ulu! We partner with local and non-profit organizations that are promoting the use of these three foods and we get them excited too. We get the different islands to showcase how they prepare these three foods for consumption and we share and eat with each other. We learn from them, and they learn from us too. And we think about how to get the message out to schools (some of this work is being done at the moment) and we get the school children and their teachers excited and involved so they would want to incorporate the festival's activities into their teaching and curriculum. The possibilities are endless.

I am merely planting a "seed" here, and from this seed, I am sure your esteemed commisioners can grow the forest.

I thank all of you esteemed commissioners for your commitment to hosting the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Cultures.

