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Molokai Community Members Assert Their Access Rights...Again

Kaluako‘i, Hawai‘i - After the recent installation of a gate on Molokai Ranch properties, Molokai community members were forced to engage in civil resistance, asserting their constitutionally protected public access rights and Native Hawaiian traditional and customary practices today. The gate blocked the pathway to Kawakiu for kupuna and families to gather limu, fish, hunt, and enjoy the beach. All beaches are held in trust for the public.

The company that owns Molokai Ranch is Singapore-based GuocoLeisure Ltd, which holds 55,575 acres of land on Molokai, as well as other assets, including shuttered hotels, an overgrown golf course, and a well that has been unpermitted for decades.

“GuocoLeisure has been punitive to our community and neglects their responsibility as good stewards and neighbors; today we say no more!” said longtime Molokai community leader, Walter Ritte. “The days of large landowners oppressing and displacing our communities in Hawai‘i are over. We are taking back our ancestral ‘āina for the people.”

The area contains archeological sites, including housing platforms, heiau, burial sites, and ahu. These sensitive areas must be protected.

On October 3, 1975, then Mayor Elmer Carvahlo joined the community in opening the gate and proclaimed, “May this gate never be closed again.” Forty-eight years later, the community has found itself fighting the same issue against the same corporate mentality. The battle for access fought by Hui Alaloa 48 years ago became the catalyst for the movement to take back Kaho‘olawe and to include constitutional protections for Native Hawaiian rights during the 1978 convention.

“The gate is an act of violence against our community and serves as a symbol of settler colonialism,” said Maui County Council Member Keani Rawlins-Fernandez. “Our community has worked hard to develop a vision for use of these 56,000 acres in ways that cultivates our pilina to ‘āina, promotes cultural and environmental stewardship, and develops an economy compatible with Molokai.”

Prolonged cattle husbandry and unmitigated deer grazing destroyed the once productive dryland forest Maunaloa was famous for. Sedimentation continues to impact the fishponds along the southwest shorelines. The community wants to restore ola (life) to the ‘āina.

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