

Hawaii Friends of Civil Rights MLK Award - Sunday, January 24, 2010
Kim Coco Iwamoto Acceptance Speech

In preparing for this evening, I came across a statement made by Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr: "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

This particular quote really touched me. "We will remember NOT the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends." We expect our enemies to lie about who we are; and when this happens we might not be surprised if a stranger is silent. But our friends? Don't we count on our friends and loved ones to watch our back?

I was relieved to discover that someone as enlightened as Dr. Rev. King could relate to that particular feeling of betrayal. I thought I was being overly sensitive. Indeed there is a profound grief and shame in the wake of this silence between friends.

But we are here tonight to celebrate - celebrate the fact that we are among friends who refuse to be silent!!! So I want to take some time to thank all the outspoken friends of civil rights who are in this room tonight:

Thank you to our heterosexual friends for speaking out against homophobia and discrimination against gays, lesbians and bisexuals.

Thank you to our normatively-gendered friends for speaking out against transphobia, and the oppression of transgender people.

Thank you to our friends in the faith community for speaking out against those who actively impose their bigotry on others in the name of religion. A special thank you to our Christian friends who stand up and scream, "Thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor!" when they hear their pastor condemning gay people in their sermons.

Thank you to our friends who are free, who speak out against human trafficking, for-profit imprisonment and enslavement.

Thank you to our friends who support full-funding for public education. A special thank you to our friends who, while they send their kids to private school, speak out in support of full-funding for public education, even if it means raising taxes. On this point – Thank you to the Late Governor John Burns for setting the bar in 1970 of what it means to invest in our youth, by allocating 50% of our State's budget toward public education.

Thank you to our friends who are not Hawaiian who speak out against the unauthorized invasion of the sovereign nation of Hawaii and its subsequent illegal occupation.

Thank you to our brothers, fathers, uncles, and sons who speak in defense of the reproductive rights of our sisters, mothers, aunties and daughters.

Thank you to ALL of Hawaii's Friends of Civil Rights for shattering the silence with your outspoken solidarity!

In the end, we will remember NOT the words of our enemies, NOR the silence of our friends, because we will remember our voices united in support of equality and justice for ALL.