Aloha Kakou,

I am Rev. Bob Belcher. I grew up on the windward side of Oʻahu in Kailua and Kahaluʻu. I’m an Air Force veteran and, until recently, I was proud to be a graduate of U.H. Mānoa.

I won’t go into the legal issues surrounding the building of the thirty meter telescope on Mauna Kea. Many people have eloquently stated the legal issues, and the courts are still deciding the legalities.

There’s no point in going into the environmental issues, if they really mattered to those in power we wouldn’t having this discussion.

I do, however, want to spotlight some truths through the lens of history. At a time when European sailors were unwilling to sail out of sight of land, Hawaiians had sailed throughout the Pacific. Iʻolani Palace, and even Hilo, had electricity before the White House. At the time of the illegal takeover of the Hawaiian Islands, America had a 23% literacy rate, Hawaiʻi had a 90% literacy rate, and most people spoke more than one language. Hawaiians were not a savage, backward, people.

Hawaiʻi, an internationally recognized, independent nation,
was taken over for the sake of political expediency, and corporate profit. The Hawaiian language was banned, and the culture was prostituted for corporate profit. The land was stolen from the people for corporate profit. Now the spiritual center of the Hawaiian people is threatened for corporate profit. Let's be clear, with a billion and a half dollars involved, there is a lot of corporate profit.

In 1969, when I graduated from high school, there were an estimated 550 speakers of the Hawaiian language left in the islands. It was estimated that by 2040 there would be no pure Hawaiians left. Now there are over 10,000 speakers of the language, and Hawaiian is once again being spoken in public, and the Hawaiian population is growing.

These incredible people, after years of being made to feel like second class citizens in their own county, are reclaiming their culture, and their identity as a people. There are two foundational items that bind a people and their culture; their native language, and their spiritual center. Mauna a Wākea is the spiritual center of the Hawaiian people. After all they have suffered over the last 150 years; to expect the Hawaiian people to give up their spiritual center for the sake of corporate profit is arrogant, absurd, and shameful.

There are sacred places all over the world. Within the mainstream, established world religions a site is deemed sacred because a human did something there. A shrine is built to commemorate the event, and a priest declares it to be a sacred site. We all honor and respect that. Indigenous cultures acknowledge a site as sacred because they recognize a special energy in the place, or a divine/spiritual presence is there. To build anything on a person’s sacred site is sacrilegious, in their eyes, and
an insult, in anyone’s eyes.

I remind you of the adage “no matter whom we are in bed with, we all sleep alone” meaning when we go to sleep at night we know if we did the right thing that day. Likewise many years from now, when you are facing your transition from this life to the next, you may remember my words. As you are surrounded by those who love you, children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, will you hold your head high with pride knowing that you did something truly great for the Hawaiian people, or will you hang your head in shame knowing that profit was your guide?

Aloha, Mālama Pono,
Rev. Bob Belcher

P.S. UH Board of Regents chair said it would be a breach of responsibility to try and "unwind" existing agreements.

I submit to you that it is a breach of responsibility to the Hawaiian people, the host nation, to move forward with a project that is in direct conflict with the will of the people, Hawaiian or not, and the laws that govern protected sites.