December 23, 2010

His Excellency Ambassador Arturo Fernandois
Embassy of Chile to the United States
1732 Massachusetts Avenue, NW.
Washington, DC 20036

Ambassador Fernandois,

The Southern California Pacific Island Communities condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the indefensible and unwarranted actions of the Chilean Government against the indigenous people of Rapa Nui. Chile’s violent and brutal response is the culmination of years of negotiations over disputed lands that have gone nowhere.

Although Chile signed and adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations in September of 2007, the armed suppression on Rapa Nui suggests that your government is not willing to come to a peaceful settlement with the islands native inhabitants. Chile’s aggressive actions suggest the intent is now to forcibly strip the native inhabitants of their rights to their lands, culture, identity and natural resources.

Land ownership was not discussed in the 1888 annexation agreement of Rapa Nui by Chile. A 1933 Chilean land registration law gave ownership of the island’s property to the Chilean government - unknown to the general population of Rapa Nui until the 1960s. They have been fighting for the return of their ancestral lands and their cultural survival ever since.

Never have the Rapa Nui natives resorted to violent measures as their concerns and protests elicited no legitimate response from the mainland authorities.

In recent years, the Chilean government has been illegally selling title to the lands in Rapa Nui to influential non-native individuals and firms. Frustrated over years of negotiations that have gone nowhere, the Rapa Nui people have responded in peaceful protest by reoccupying property on their ancestral lands. On December 3, 2010, after months of relatively peaceful reoccupation of their lands, Chilean troops forcibly evicted and opened fire on the unarmed Rapa Nui natives. Several dozens of Rapa Nui were injured.

We condemn the heavy-handed actions of the Chilean government presided by President Sebastian Pinera and Minister of the Interior, Rodrigo Hinzpeter.
It is unnecessary for riot police to shoot unarmed protesters. This is entirely contrary to the intent of the United Nations Declaration that Chile is party to.
The culture of the indigenous Rapa Nui people is tied to the land. Te Pito Te Henua, "navel and uterus" or the umbilical cord to the world is how the people of Rapa Nui sometimes refer to their island. It is where they believe they come from and where their ancestors live after they leave this world. Any development on Rapa Nui should be done with respect to the ancestral lands, the culture of the people of Rapa Nui, the signed UN Declaration and the confines of Chilean law.

We are prepared to throw the political strength of our 450,000 strong diverse Pacific Islander community in California behind this effort to make people aware of what is happening in Rapa Nui. We are also prepared to mount an energetic press campaign to inform our families, friends, supporters, organizations and respective governments, here, on our homelands and abroad, about the egregious, heavy-handed and brutal acts carried out by the Chilean Government against our Polynesian cousins in Rapa Nui.

We urge President Pinera to become immediately and directly involved to resolve this growing crisis; to halt the genocide of the people of Rapa Nui and to help with the return of the Rapa Nui people to their homelands. We also urge President Pinera to reinstate the inherent rights of the indigenous people of Rapa Nui to their lands, their culture and their rights as human beings to live freely and cohesively on Rapa Nui as well as in Chile.

We welcome an open dialogue so that you may answer these concerns. We also make our selves available to you if there is anything we can do to assist in a peaceful and diplomatic resolution to this crisis. We humbly ask for your support in restoring peace and unity to our cousins in Polynesia as we grieve for their loss.

LONO A. KOLLARS, PRESIDENT
Save Rapa Nui U.S.A. Coalition
22545 Scarlet Sage Way
Moreno Valley, Ca., U.S.A. 92557

enc

c: Barack Obama, President of the United States
Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary General of the United Nations
Barbara Boxer, U.S. Senator, State of California
Diane Feinstein, U.S. Senator, State of California
Daniel K. Akaka, U.S. Senator, State of Hawai‘i
Daniel Inouye, U.S. Senator, State of Hawai‘i
Eni Faleomavaega, U.S. Congressman from American Samoa
Madeliene Z. Bordallo, Congresswoman from Guam
Gregorio Sablan, Congressman from the Northern Mariana Islands
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Jerry Brown, Governor of the Great State of California
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