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Maulian Dana, Penobscot Tribal Ambassador, speaking at the Maine Statehood and Bicentennial Conference.
Courtesy of the Maine Statehood and Bicentennial Conference, University of Maine

*Statement of Maulian Dana, Penobscot Nation Tribal Ambassador to
the Maine Statehood and Bicentennial Conference*

May 31, 2019

Kkwey. Ntaliwisi Maulian Dana naka noceyo Panawahpskewik. Kamac nolasweltam eliyut pecihpeht psitte wen. Hello, my name is Maulian Dana and I am from the Penobscot Nation. I am very thankful we all have gathered here. As Maine celebrates 200 years of its statehood it serves as a space for all Mainers to reflect, learn, share, and express what this occasion means to us individually and collectively. As an Indigenous woman born and raised in this state, I likely have a perspective that would not historically be shared in places like this. I do not ever take it for granted that I am able to speak and be heard. I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors who fought wars for a country that did not allow them to vote; who watched their land, resources, culture, and families torn from them; who sacrificed so much so that I could not only exist but know my identity as a Penobscot person. They protected the language. They guarded our traditions with their lives. They prayed hard that we would not disappear. In everything I do I keep in mind that my life is their prayers answered.

We are here to commemorate the bicentennial of Maine. This comes with mixed feelings for myself and other Wabanaki. Our ties to this land existed long before America was dreamed of. The artifacts, oral tradition, legends, and historical records all point to thousands of years of Wabanaki being here in our homeland.

To wrap our heads around a bicentennial celebration we need to acknowledge those mixed feelings and the intergenerational trauma but also to look to the future and how we best move forward in the current social and government systems. We maintain our Indigenous communities and lifeways and are also neighbors to cities and towns. Many citizens of these towns have taken it upon themselves to educate themselves on the Tribal Nations and even stand up as allies in our causes. There are many individuals, organizations, governing bodies, schools, and universities such as this one that have realized the only way to understand the full scope of being from Maine is to be aware of not just the history, but the effects of that history throughout generations.

I cannot stand before you this evening and be a cheerleader for the bicentennial after my people endured generations of attempted genocide, broken treaties, racism, disease, addiction, and all the spokes in the wheel of colonial oppression. However, the silver lining is that I can stand here as a testament to the power of shared humanity. I can stand here in front of your listening ears and open hearts with the knowledge that we have come so far and have the power to keep going. I can stand here, in the state of Maine, which this year has both replaced Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day and banned the use of Indian mascots. I can stand here and have you see me as human as everyone else. I can stand here confident that tribal sovereignty, stewardship of lands and waters, inherent self-determination are not merely conceptual unrealistic pipedreams for my Nation but that we are making great strides and they are attainable in practice.

Progress is painful and walking into one fire after another has a way of singeing off your defenses and leaving you raw and angry. My hope each day for my people is that we walk through fewer of these fiery battles and feel more of the cool relief of equality and justice wash over us like the currents of the sacred Penobscot River, which is home to our Nation and the land we stand on here at University of Maine, Orono.

As a proud graduate of the University of Maine I am honored to be here tonight. Please take my words as seeds to plant in your minds as you move about your life's work. It makes me proud to see the collaboration between the Penobscot Nation and the University, and I have hopes that we will continue to develop and grow the relationship. Education is the great equalizer across this state and country and my degree has helped me not just in my career but also to provide for my daughters as a young single mother and now, at ages ten and twelve, they can picture a future in Maine that is made brighter and more possible by the work we all do today. I thank you for that work and I look forward to more of it.

In her book, *Molly Molasses and Me: A Collection of Living Adventures*, the late Penobscot author, leader, and activist ssipsis says, "we are scavengers from the old times, being driven in the present, and riding on hopes into the future ... we are Native and allow the spirit of ourselves to drive us on to the next sunset."

Akwane, welcome to Penobscot territory. I wish you hope and truth in all your quests for the next sunset.

Mesi ntalnapemanawak, all my relations.