

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**August 27, 2011**

***Media Contacts:***

Elizabeth B. Jenkins, President  
Wiraqocha Foundation  
(808) 430-3448  
[mail@wiraqochafoundation.org](mailto:mail@wiraqochafoundation.org)

John Thatcher, Principal  
Connections Public Charter School  
(866) 961-3664 or (808) 959-6307  
[john.thatcher@connectionscharterschool.org](mailto:john.thatcher@connectionscharterschool.org)



The Q'ero Nation represents the last of the direct cultural and spiritual descendants of the Inka Empire. They were recognized by the unique patterns of their weaving in 1949 by Peruvian Anthropologist Oscar Nunez Del Prado. A group of Q'ero elders recently attended the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in Cuzco, Peru. Many representatives from Hawaii attended the conference where Native people gather from all over the world to discuss the state of education for their children and champion the addition of indigenous values into modern education settings. During the conference, a group of Q'ero students presented a traditional Q'ero song in their native language of Quechua (the native language of the Inka Empire and the mother tongue of Peru before the Spanish invasion in 1532). These children were chosen by their elders to represent their traditional values and culture and to become ambassadors of their ancestral knowledge to the world.

Four Q'ero students and one of their parents will soon be visiting charter schools and 'Aha Pūnana Leo on the Big Island. "Connections Public Charter School saved our program," said Elizabeth Jenkins, President of the Wiraqocha Foundation (the non-profit organization that is sponsoring the visit). The group was originally slated to visit Ka'u and work with two English teachers. After months of planning, the teachers suddenly quit in May. "John Thatcher just stepped up and invited the kids to attend their multicultural focused charter school in Hilo. It was like a miracle," Jenkins said. The students will spend two months visiting Connections, Waters of Life, Hawai'i Academy of Arts & Sciences, and Innovations Public Charter School. They will be focusing on learning English while sharing their powerful ancestral knowledge.

"The principals from the participating charter schools all wrote letters to the American Embassy in Peru in support of this project. The embassy also received letters of support from State Representative Bob Herkes, Representative Cindy Evans, Senator Josh Green, and Senator Gil Kahele," Thatcher commented. Representative Herkes wrote, "The founders of the Connections Public Charter School held the belief that social realities of our society and the influence of culture and ethnicity on human growth and development need to be essential components of effective teaching and learning. The school offers a well-rounded, innovative environment in which cultural coexistence and ethnic diversity factor into student academic programs. The youth are expected to understand and apply multicultural thinking, along with civic, historical, and geographic knowledge to better serve as citizens in today's world of diverse cultures. It is my sincere belief that by allowing the Peruvian students to visit with the students, faculty, and the Connections Public Charter School community, the scholars from both worlds will come away with an exceptionally valuable, inspiring, and practical learning experience."

"Most Q'ero children have to walk three hours through the mountains to attend one of the only two schools available for this lost tribe of the high Andes of Peru" Jenkins added. "They still live in stone houses with no electricity as their Inka ancestors did 500 years ago. Thanks to a recent water project, partially funded by the Wiraqocha Foundation, they now have a little running water. The father visiting with the students, Don Juan Apaza Flores, is a powerful traditional healer and a priest of the ancestral knowledge. He will be offering healings and readings during his visit to the Big Island. The Wiraqocha Foundation will be sponsoring seminars on Inka traditions on September 10-11 and September 17-18. All proceeds will benefit this Q'ero kids project." Please see [www.wiraqochafoundation.org](http://www.wiraqochafoundation.org) for more information.

###