

Marching for humanity

Dozens tout myriad causes in parade

by Jason Armstrong
Tribune-Herald Staff Writer

Dozens of people calling for political and social change took to Hilo's busiest streets Saturday morning in a peaceful march that generated support and curiosity from onlookers.

Signs displaying anti-war messages, opposition to the Superferry and calls for ending the use of genetically modified foods were all on display.

"Too much pain in the community needs to be corrected," Roger Christie said as he walked along Kanoelehua Avenue carrying a large sign bearing the image of a pink heart.

The "March for Humanity" was the creation of Joe Farias III, a former bookstore owner turned self-proclaimed "revolutionary civil rights educator."

"Marching is powerful. Demonstrating is powerful," Farias said upon reaching the end of the 3-mile march at Piopio Field fronting Kamehameha Avenue.

A band played, food was served and a few people gave speeches as the marchers slowly went on their way.

"We're going to be doing this every month," Farias said of the inaugural event that attracted about 75 marchers. "People are tired. People want liberation (and) freedom."

Among those seeking a little relief after the march was Puna Councilwoman Emily Naeole, who had just returned Friday from an exhausting tour of trash incinerators in two East Coast states.

"A couple of times my brain was saying, 'Catch a ride to my car,'" Naeole said while sitting under a shade tree as fellow participants offered her oranges and cookies.

A former geothermal protester, Naeole marched for the protection of kalo, also known as taro, from genetic modification.

"I thought that was appropriate for me," said the Native Hawaiian lawmaker, adding she also supports the anti-war messages.

County police and the state highways officials declined to issue a permit to close public roads, so marchers couldn't walk in the traffic lanes as some originally desired.

"The Police Department cannot provide the manpower necessary to protect the marchers, motorists and onlookers without the use of special duty officers, which are required for this type of road closure," police said in a statement Thursday.

That limitation appeared to be fine with participants, who used sidewalks and observed traffic lights when crossing intersections.

At least two uniformed police officers were seen before the start of the 9 a.m. march, which began at Waiakea Center. Police showed "full respect," said Christie, who's running for Hawaii County mayor.

"Everybody loves, you know, respecting the First Amendment," he said.

The march drew honks, shaka signs and waves from curious onlookers, some of whom had no idea what it was about.

Observer Flavius Paul said protesters never seem to go beyond raising problems.

"They don't give the answers," he said. "What is the option to stop the war?"

Friend Patrick Bell, an employee of Chika's gas station and automobile-repair shop, praised the march after being told of its purpose.

America, the Palau native said as the marchers passed, needs to choose a new president "who understands the whole world."

Dressed in a white painter's suit and wearing a hard-hat to resemble hazmat gear, Paul Normann helped carry a sign calling for local radiation monitoring.

"We are down here to help raise awareness about the depleted uranium that's been found up on Pohakuloa," he said of the recent discovery of radioactive material at the Big Island Army base.

Normann said his participation in the march will make a difference.

"Every citizen has to take responsibility for their government," he added.

Noelie Rodriguez, a lecturer at the University of Hawaii at Hilo, was calling for clean elections and having the government finance candidates' election campaigns to remove the influence of special interests.

"It's the reform that makes other reforms possible," she said.

Rodriguez suggested the Police Department's early response reduced the number of participants, yet they "were very professional" at the march.

Veteran peace activist Jim Albertini, who heads the Malu Aina Center for Nonviolent Education and Action in Kurtistown, said he was marching to show "solidarity with all the issues facing our planet."

Those include the threat of a U.S. war with Iran, he said.

"I find it refreshing that here's a march that I haven't had to be the organizer of," Albertini said with a chuckle as he wheeled a sign displaying a radiation-hazard sign. "I can just be a participant."

Jason Armstrong can be reached at jarmstrong@hawaii-tribune-herald.com.



Joe Farias III, holding banner at right, helps lead about 75 people through Hilo Saturday for his inaugural "March for Humanity" event aimed at supporting political and social change. - Jason Armstrong/Tribune-Herald