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Peace call marks war anniversary - Houstonians protest the 2nd anniversary of occupation in Iraq

By ANNE MARIE KILDAY and ZEKE MANAYA - Copyright 2005 Houston Chronicle

A day of peaceful protest marches and ceremonies, including a meditative walk, were held in Houston on Saturday to mark the second anniversary of the war in Iraq.

Calling for an end to U.S. involvement in Iraq, hundreds marched through the streets of Montrose, walked silently on the grounds of the Rothko Chapel, and sang peace songs during a candlelit vigil on the grounds of Houston City Hall.

The early afternoon, one-mile trek in the Montrose area drew about 200 marchers to the 4500 block of Dunlavy. The event wound up with songs and a poetry-filled rally at Bell Park.

"This is what democracy looks like!" a marcher yelled into a bullhorn as passing motorists expressed support with a honk of a car horn or disapproval with derisive shouts.

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About five counter-protesters engaged in a brief shouting match with several marchers, but Houston police officers quickly stepped in to maintain order.

No arrests or injuries were reported, police said.

The Montrose march was organized by Houston Global Awareness and several other local organizations, including the Harris County Green Party, the Internationalist Socialist Organization, Latinos Por La Paz, Mexicanos en Accion and the Worldwide Movement for Justice and Peace.

"We're telling everybody that war does not solve problems; it creates them," said Art Browning, a 57-year-old geologist from Cypress.

More events to come

Raj Mankad, a 28-year-old writer and editor of a feminist economic journal, said the march was the beginning of several events planned to make the second anniversary of the war.

"The military occupation of Iraq continues to cost human lives, so I continue to protest," he said.

The Houston Area Department of Peace held the "walking meditation" on the grounds of the Rothko Chapel, said organizer Kathy Kidd.

"Our walk was a way to honor all the victims of all wars," Kidd said.

"During a walking meditation, your feet barely touch the ground, in a slow walk that is a time to reflect on peace: peace in your own life and in the world," Kidd said.

There is a nationwide movement to create a federal Department of Peace, which would focus on world disarmament and domestic issues in the United States, Kidd said. The Houston group will participate in a nationwide campaign in May, in which members will bake apple pies for members of Congress in support of the new federal agency.

"Our slogan is, 'We want a piece of the pie,' " Kidd explained.

Kidd was one of about 200 participants in "a peace rally" held during a light rain in front of Houston City Hall Saturday evening.

The crowd held their hands over flickering candles and sang anti-war songs such as Blowin' in the Wind and John Lennon's Imagine.

Wearing a Lennon T-shirt emblazoned with peace signs, 12-year-old Louis Pentecost of Denton sang along with the protesters, saying his parents had brought him to the rally.

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Organizers from the Progressive Action Alliance said their goal Saturday evening was to memorialize U.S. military and Iraqi civilians who have been killed in the two years since the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

"We are not calling this a protest, but a rally for peace," said co-chair Bill Crosier. "We are respectful of our troops who are there, they signed up with the idea that they would protect our country. We feel the best way to support the troops is to bring them home, and to let the Iraqis settle things themselves."

Military mom joins in

As a taped version of taps played over a stereo system, participants at the vigil read the names of U.S. troops killed in action in Iraq.

Crosier said the names of Iraqi civilians known to have been killed during military actions in the last two years also had been posted on large bulletin boards on the grounds.

Sherry Glover, the mother of Pvt. Katherine Hauff, and a member of Military Families Speak Out, also addressed the rally.

Glover was accompanied by her daughter, who is currently separated from active duty in the Army as she awaits the birth of her first child.

Hauff's husband is currently stationed in Kuwait, and is bound for duty in Iraq.

Glover said that her initial involvement in the peace movement "wasn't very positive," because she faced mistrust from other military families as well as anti-war activists.

Rabbi Shaul Osadchey, of Congregation Or Ami, was one of three religious leaders who participated in the vigil. The Rev. David Wahl, of Pax Christi, a Roman Catholic peace organization, and Buddhist monk Dada Phalashudananda also offered remarks and prayers.

Osadchey prayed for the safety of the U.S. soldiers in Iraq, and for peace.

"May the one who brings peace to the heavens also bring peace to the nations of the world," he said.

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