

# Sept. 11 brings hopes of aloha in Mideast

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The Associated Press

PEARL CITY — Across the globe Thursday, the unbelievable bloodshed of two years before was remembered. But in a small Leeward Community College classroom, talk was only of peace.

An Israeli and a Palestinian might seem like enemies. But before a standing-room-only crowd of nearly 100, they spoke of their joint vision of reconciliation.

"Most of the time, all you read in the media is how Jews and Palestinians are fighting," said Eliyahu McLean, a Jewish man who grew up on Oahu and now lives in Jerusalem. "Rami and I are here as a personal example of how a Jew and a Muslim can be working together for positive change," he said, referring to Rami Mahamid, a Palestinian who lives in the village of Faradis in Israel.

The two men spoke as the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, were remembered and as the Mideast peace process seemed to take yet another turn, with Israel threatening to remove Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

Both McLean, 34, and Mahamid, 24, are involved in grass-roots peace efforts in the Middle East. And Thursday, they expressed their hope that Hawaii could play a role in the cause.

Aloha Peace House, a nonprofit that just started up and helped bring the two men to Hawaii, unveiled plans to bring Israeli and Palestinian teenagers to the islands this December. They would join for Aloha Quest, a two-week program aimed at helping the young people develop their own role in world peace, working side by side with Hawaii teens.

"The problem with most peace groups," said McLean, "is that they preach to the choir. We have to open up the peace circle to in-

clude the voices that are not heard."

Husamuddin Akhras, a native of the West Bank city of Nablus who now lives in Hawaii, founded the Aloha Quest program and hopes it someday will bring 100 children from conflict areas all over the world to Hawaii each month. The peace camp will be based on three acres of donated land outside of Volcano village on the Big Island.

Aloha Peace House needs to raise \$75,000 for its pilot peace camp and hopes to amass more to build a house on donated property.

"I get the feeling that Hawaii is a very unique place in all of the world where all different people live together," said Mahamid, who speaks both Arabic and Hebrew, with McLean translating his Hebrew.

Mahamid, on his first trip outside the Middle East, said he hoped the young people who had the opportunity to visit Hawaii would "return to the Holy Land and help recreate that coexistence."

The message of peace touched many of the participants, who said they were unaware of the presence of grass roots peace efforts between Palestinians and Israelis.

"The only thing I knew about it was war," said Liezel Ballesteros, 20, a student at Leeward, referring to the Middle East. "It makes me want to help them out."

Stephanie Dzibkowski, another 20-year-old student, who moved to Hawaii from upstate New York a year ago, also was moved.

"It's a very hard day for me," said Dzibkowski, who was wearing a T-shirt with New York's skyline, her eyes welling with tears as she recalled the weight of Sept. 11. "This gives me a lot of hope."

■ *For more information or to help the Aloha Quest program, contact Aloha Peace House by e-mailing [nationsofpeace@yahoo.com](mailto:nationsofpeace@yahoo.com).*