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Army 1st Lt. Ehren Watada participated in a talk open to the public last night at Church of the Crossroads. Watada, above, stood with his father, Bob Watada, in the background before the start of the program. [CLICK FOR LARGE](#)

Watada states his case in Moiliili

Standing ovations greet a soldier facing a court-martial for refusing to go to Iraq

By Leila Fujimori
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A highly sympathetic crowd of a few hundred people gave Army 1st Lt. Ehren Watada standing ovations before, during and after a speech at the Church of the Crossroads in Moiliili.

Watada, a Honolulu native, faces court-martial in Fort Lewis, Wash., next month on six counts for refusing to deploy to Iraq and for conduct unbecoming an officer, charges that carry a maximum six years' imprisonment. He was back in Honolulu to meet with his attorney and visit with family.

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Watada acknowledged that his actions have divided the community. "That was not my intent," he said. But upon learning the facts of the war, he said he was in turmoil.

He called the war in Iraq an illegal war of aggression.

He quoted Nazi Germany's Hermann Goering, who said while the common people are usually not willing to go to war, "all you have to do is tell them they are being attacked."

Watada said the American people were deceived by the Bush administration, which manipulated intelligence to fit policy and regime change in Iraq.

"We have been lied to, deceived and betrayed," he said. "A crime has been committed against the constitution."

He also told the audience that 10 intelligence agencies concluded the presence of American troops in Iraq are "fueling Islamic extremism all over the world."

He said as a military officer he needed to take a stand.

"I hated to leave my troops, but something had to be done to stop this insanity," he said.

"How could I order men to die for something I believe is wrong?" he said.

Watada said he could no longer condone the war and asked himself if he had the ability to do something about it, and took it upon himself to speak on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves.

"Wearing the uniform is not and is never an excuse," he said.

His message fell on receptive ears.

Kristen Clyne, 31, a graduate student at the University of Hawaii, said the speech was "really inspiring."

She said she liked that Watada didn't focus on legislators to make changes, but on people.

"This war wouldn't really be permitted without the support of the people, and it is really on the people to stop this war," she said.

Daniel Chung, 54, noted, "It's about time somebody did something."

"Some people would rather die than admit they're wrong, but he's willing to put his reputation on the line. That's true patriotism," Chung said.

But not everyone totally supported Watada. A retired soldier who did not want to be identified said she was curious to hear him.

"I agree with what he's saying (about the war), but he was still in uniform. But he had the obligation of following orders and he didn't.

"It's too bad because I'm sure he's going to prison."

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