

Profile of Peace

SOA Watch

SOA Watch is an independent organization that seeks to close the US Army School of the Americas, under whatever name it is called, through vigils and fasts, demonstrations and nonviolent protest, as well as media and legislative work. In 1990, SOA Watch began in a tiny apartment outside the main gate of Ft. Benning. While starting with a small group, SOA Watch quickly drew upon the knowledge and experience of many in the U.S. who had worked with the people of Latin America in the 1970's and 80's. Today, the SOA Watch movement is a large, diverse, grassroots movement rooted in solidarity with the people of Latin America. The goal of SOA Watch is to close the SOA and to change U.S. foreign policy in Latin America by educating the public, lobbying Congress and participating in creative, nonviolent resistance. Each November, around the anniversary of the murder of the six Jesuit priests in El Salvador, the SOA Watch holds a Vigil in remembrance of the many victims of SOA graduates. This Vigil starts with a solemn funeral procession for these victims and ends with a high-energy celebration of hope for the future.

A Bloody History

Though the exact number of victims of SOA graduates is hard to determine, at least 75,000 have been killed in El Salvador and 200,000 in Guatemala. Graduates of the SOA/WHINSEC have been cited in the following atrocities, as well as many others.

- **November 16, 1989, San Salvador, El Salvador:** Six Jesuit priests and their housekeeper and her daughter were brutally murdered.
- **March 24, 1980, San Salvador, El Salvador:** While celebrating the Eucharist, Archbishop Oscar A. Romero was shot and killed at the altar by a death squad assassin. As Archbishop, Father Romero was a source of strength and hope for the poor and oppressed, working with and for them, taking their struggles as his own.
- **Dec 2, 1980, El Salvador:** The rape and murder of four United States churchwomen at a military checkpoint near San Salvador.
- **December, 1980 El Mozote, El Salvador:** U. S. trained Salvadoran battalion massacred over 1000 men, women and children in El Mozote. Ten of the twelve officers responsible for the murders were SOA graduates.
- **1989, Guatemala:** Sister Dianna Ortiz, a United States citizen, while working as a missionary, abducted and brutally tortured by Guatemalan security agents. "My back was burned over 100 times with cigarettes. I was gang-raped...beaten...lowered into a pit where injured women, children, and men writhed and moaned, and the dead decayed, under swarms of rats."

What Can You Do?

Educate yourself! Visit these websites to learn more about the School of the Americas:

- www.soaw.org
- <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/episodes/18/spotlight/>
- <http://www.ciponline.org/facts/soa.htm>
- <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h110-1707>

Pass along the information to your friends and family!

Pray for the group of students who will be traveling to the Ignatian Family Teach-In and SOA Rally next weekend.

Join clubs on campus that promote peace and justice issues, such as J.U.S.T.I.C.E, United Students for Fair Trade, Amnesty International, and so on.

Write to your members of Congress to support legislation that seeks to prohibit funding to the SOA/ WHINSEC, like HR 1707.

Volunteer!

Applications are now available for Alternative Spring Break and can be found in places around campus and in Campus Ministry (OM 207). Contact Sarah Signorino (ext 2424) in Campus Ministry for more information.

You can also volunteer here in Buffalo with a Service Intern at locations such as Vive la Casa, Benedict House, South Buffalo Community Table, Habitat for Humanity, and etc. Contact Joe VanVolkenburg (ext 2875) in Campus Ministry for more information!

Inform your conscience! Be an educated member of the public!



PEACE and JUSTICE

Volume 4: November 16, 2008

SPOTLIGHT ON THE SOA

From the desk of an SOA Protester:

My experience at the gates of Fort Benning was like nothing I had ever known before. What began with the solemn funeral procession, ended in a most uplifting rally. With every name read in the litany of those killed by SOA graduates the reality of this injustice hit home, especially when the names of young children or unidentified victims were read. What was even more devastating was to think that these names were only a portion of the victims known to us. There are most likely hundreds, even thousands more. The 200,000 of us in the crowd honored the dead calling out "Presente" during the litany. And with each "Presente" we made the promise: "No Mas, No More." This was extremely inspiring for me; I had never before experienced solidarity like that before.

For me, the most important part of the weekend was the rally after the funeral procession. Students, young concerned citizens got together banging buckets and other homemade percussion instruments chanting together. "Hey, Hey, ho, ho, the SOA has got to Go!" What was so important and what struck me so much was that these students and I were taking advantage of our rights. We had the right to assemble and protest; rights that were not guaranteed to our sisters and brothers in Central America, rights denied to them as result of United States training that their military received.

The cry within the crowd changed to "Show me what democracy looks like" and the response was "This is what democracy looks like!" I remember thinking, "This is democracy; this is the most patriotic thing I could be doing." To quote Ani DiFranco "We have to be able to criticize what we love, say what we have to say 'cause if you're not trying to make something better...you're just in the way."

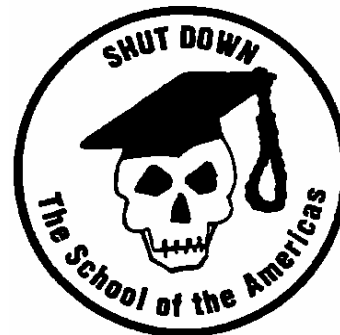
I came away from the crowd and boarded the bus to go home to Buffalo a new, empowered citizen. I had feelings of excitement about my ability to make a difference, and frustration at my government for allowing something like the SOA to exist. But, more importantly I learned that while ignorance is bliss, injustice thrives in it. I found the only right thing to do was to get involved and spread the word. The more informed people are, the less they will stand for injustices like the School of Americas. I am convinced that people have the power to effect change, we just need to use it.

- Marie Schuster

Know the FACTS...

What is the School of the Americas/ WHINSEC?

- The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly known as the School of the Americas, is a United States Department of Defense facility, which is located on Fort Benning, near Columbus, Georgia.
- The school was originally located in Panama, when it was created in 1946, as a reaction during the Cold War. It was relocated to Fort Benning in 1984.
- The SOA has taught nearly 61,000 military personal from Latin America since its creation. These students are schooled in the subjects of infantry weapons, counter insurgency, and "specialized leadership skills". Classes are taught primarily in Spanish and are taught by Latin American teachers.
- The Pentagon has responded to the growing movement against the SOA and Congress' near closure of the school with a PR campaign to give the SOA a new image. In an attempt to disassociate the school with its horrific past, the SOA was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation in January of 2001. WHINSEC is in the same building, with the same students and same instructors. They may have changed the name, but the School of Assassins persists.



"They tell us they're teaching democracy. We say, 'How do you teach democracy through the barrel of a gun?' "

Fr Roy Bourgeois, SOA Watch