



Call to Justice

Newsletter of the Justice & Peace Office of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ

“Call to Justice” is a bi-monthly newsletter from the Adorers of the Blood of Christ Justice and Peace Office. It is published to clarify, update, and focus ASC efforts for justice and peace and to encourage solidarity among us as we speak and act for the welfare of all people and our Earth. Insights and input from ASCs and associates are welcome.



United States Province
Justice and Peace Office
2 Pioneer Lane
Red Bud, IL 62278
618-282-6229
Fax: 618-282-3266
www.adorers.org

THE SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS

Precious Blood Congregations and the School of the Americas

In early September several members of Precious Blood Congregations met at the CPPS Convent in O’Fallon and shared about experiences of vigils with SOA Watch (SOAW) calling for the close of the School of the Americas (SOA). The events are deeply prayerful and nonviolent. Members have felt the call to respond to the Cry of the Blood on behalf of those who have lost their lives through the violence of the SOA. The Vigil Action this year will be on November 19-21, 2004. Precious Blood members are preparing a special banner for use as they take part in the march at Fort Benning, Georgia. A Eucharistic celebration for members of the Precious Blood family is being planned.

The School of the Americas Watch has organized vigils there every November for over ten years. Students, religious, labor, veterans, human rights, and social/global justice groups converge at the gates of the Army post to speak out in solidarity with the people of the Americas and to engage in nonviolent direct action. The number of demonstrators has been increasing year by year, with over 10,000 present in November 2003.

Teach-ins, trainings, and caucuses will precede events of the demonstration this year on Friday, November 19. Details and direct action are available at the SOAW web site: www.soaw.org. The protest organizers provide legal briefing for people considering civil disobedience at the protest from the SOAW. The demonstrations have led to many arrests and imprisonment over the years, with sentencing steadily increasing in severity. The Adorers of the Blood of Christ living in Fairview Heights, Illinois have been offering support to a sister in prison for her participation in the demonstration at Fort Benning last November. (Please see story p. 4.)

History of the School of the Americas

The School of the Americas was first established as the U.S. Army Caribbean Training Center in Panama in 1946 to help professionalize Latin American and Caribbean militaries. In 1963, under President John F. Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress, the training center was renamed the School of the Americas (SOA). Along with the name change, the School changed to a Cold War focus. In 1984, the school was forced to move from Panama to Fort Benning, near Columbus, Georgia, under the terms of the Panama Canal Treaties.

SOA trains Latin American soldiers in combat, counter-insurgency, infantry tactics, military intelligence, counter narcotics operations, and commando operations. US taxpayers fund this training, and all the training is conducted in Spanish. Latin Ameri

Continued on page 2



can instructors teach most of the classes. According to the SOA, more than 60,000 members of Latin American militaries have attended the school since its beginning in 1946. SOA graduates are responsible for some of the worst human rights abuses in Latin America. In 1996 the Pentagon was forced to release training manuals used at the school that advocated torture, extortion, and execution. Among the SOA's graduates are notorious dictators Manuel Noriega and Omar Torrijos of Panama, Leopoldo Galtieri and Roberto Viola of Argentina, Juan Velasco Alvarado of Peru, Guillermo Rodriguez of Ecuador, Rios Montt of Guatemala and Hugo Banzer Suarez of Bolivia. Lower-level graduates have participated in human rights abuses that include assassination of Archbishop Romero, the rape and murder of four US churchwomen, the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter, and the El Mozote Massacre of 900 civilians.

In an attempt to deflect public criticism and disassociate the school from its dubious reputation, the SOA was renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC) in 2001. The name change was a result of a Department of Defense (DOD) proposal included in the Defense Authorization Bill for Fiscal 2001 at a time when SOA opponents were poised to win a congressional vote on legislation that would have dismantled the school. The new name, however, did not change the mission and operation of the SOA. A point-by-point comparison between the old school and the new school shows that the changes are almost entirely cosmetic.

The Feb. 12, 2004 Dear Colleague Letter of Rep. James P. McGovern shows how the name change did not change the school:

“None of the fundamental issues raised around the need to close the school have been addressed by the WHINSEC — not its training methods, nor its lack of oversight, nor the school's graduating of human rights abusers. Virtually the same courses are being taught, the oversight committee does not appear to be vigorous, the number of hours devoted to human rights training has not changed, the staff has not been changed or retrained in any way, no commission was established to review and re-think the curriculum or methods or any other aspect of the school, and no problem with past methods or results was ever truly admitted.”

In the SOA only one of the 42 courses in the 1996 course catalogue — “Democratic Sustainment”— focuses on democracy and human rights and in 1997, only 13 students took this course compared with 118 who took “Military Intelligence.”

The Pentagon has claimed that human rights abuses by SOA graduates are in the past. However, the problems continued. Guatemalan human rights champion Bishop Juan Gerardi was murdered in 1998. SOA graduate and former head of Guatemala's D-2 Intelligence Unit, Col. Lima Estrada has been charged with his murder. In Colombia, kidnapping and killings of unarmed civilians have been attributed to SOA graduates by the United Nations and international human rights organizations. The SOAW web site reports a growing list of continuing abuses.

Some U.S. legislators claim that it is unfair to blame the SOA for the actions of a “few bad apples.” SOA graduates have been found to be major players in investigated human rights abuses. It is not just a few bad apples. Over two thirds of Salvadoran officers cited by the United Nations Truth Commission for human rights

abuses were SOA graduates. Over 50 percent of the Colombian officers cited in a definitive human rights report on Colombia were from the SOA. 40 percent of the cabinet members under three brutal Guatemalan dictatorships were all SOA graduates. The full scope of atrocities committed by SOA graduates will likely never be known because members of the Latin American militaries are generally above the law. It is rare that crimes by members of these militaries are investigated and rarer still when the names of those suspected are released.

The School of the Americas Watch

Founded by Maryknoll priest Fr. Roy Bourgeois in 1990, the School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) is an independent grassroots organization that seeks to close the School of the Americas through vigils and fasts, demonstrations and nonviolent protest, as well as media and legislative work. The SOAW seeks to stand in solidarity with the people of Latin America as it works to close the SOA and change oppressive U.S. foreign policy. Father Roy maintains an office in Columbus, Georgia, at the gates of Fort Benning, where the SOA/WHINSEC is located. In 1996, Carol Richardson joined the SOA Watch and opened a Washington DC office. There are currently five full-time staff.

Please pray for the close of the school. If you can, donate to the School of the Americas Watch at PO Box 4566, Washington, DC 20017. Call/write/fax/email members of Congress asking their support for legislation to close the school.



SAMPLE LETTER

Dear Representative/Senator [last name]:

I write to urge support for human rights in Latin America. Please support legislation to close the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), formerly the United States Army School of the Americas (SOA). The graduates of this school have a long history of human rights violations. From the atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980's to recent violations in Colombia, SOA/WHINSEC graduates consistently appear in reports on human rights abuses in Latin America. SOA/WHINSEC training has resulted in civilian massacres, assassinations, disappearances, death threats and coups of democratically elected governments in the hemisphere.

Despite efforts to silence opposition through a name change and cosmetic changes, it is still a combat training school that provides dangerous skills and weaponry to countries with serious and current human rights problems. The proliferation of skills like counter-insurgency and psychological warfare in countries like Colombia, where impunity is offered to paramilitaries, only perpetuates the cycles of violence. Keeping the school open under any name sends a powerful anti-human rights message. Establishing reasonable living conditions for the people of Latin America and strengthening civil institutions will do more to stabilize the region than training militaries. Closing the SOA/WHINSEC would demonstrate that the United States has made a clean break from the tragic history of the school and its graduates.

As your constituent, I urge you to take the legislative action needed to close the SOA/WHINSEC. Please send me information of progress on this important matter.

Sincerely,
[Your full name and address]

Address Letter to:

Representative

The Honorable [Full Name]
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

or

Senator

The Honorable [Full Name]
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The “Write” Thing to Do

When word reached our local community that a 68-year-old School Sister of Notre Dame from the St. Louis Province had been sentenced to serve time in a Federal prison for trespassing at what had been formerly called the School of the Americas, we were appalled, incensed, and outraged. The sentence for this misdemeanor seemed “criminal” and more a reflection on the punitive and ineffective system of justice in our country than on a decisive act of civil disobedience by Cynthia Brinkman, SSND.

We kept saying, “somebody” should do something about this. This is not right! “Somebody” should support Cynthia. “Somebody” should let her know how much we admire her for putting her body on the line by “crossing the line.” As we talked further, it became clear to us that the logical “somebody” was in reality, “somebodies”... namely three of us who share community life as Adorers of the Blood of Christ in Southern Illinois.



We had the opportunity to meet Cynthia in person at the SSND Motherhouse in St. Louis, at a prayer vigil held shortly before she began her sentence at the prison in Pekin, IL, in April 2004. After the prayer, we waited with the crowd of people who gathered around her to say their last few words of encouragement, and to give one more hug before she went off to “serve her time.” When it was our turn, we introduced ourselves and told of our commitment to pray for her every Friday, and to write to her every week as a tangible expression of our support. Graciously, she thanked us. Up close, she didn’t look at all like a criminal. She looked like a woman of justice about to pay the consequences for doing the “right” thing.

As we wrote to Cynthia each week, we, in turn, received copies of the letters she wrote to her many friends and supporters. Through her writing, we became more aware of the injustices of the penal system. We noticed that our prayer, which began simply for Cynthia began to stretch beyond to include other men and women imprisoned for the sake of justice. Eventually, we even began to pray for the “felons” with whom she shared life and daily reality in Pekin.

Cynthia’s courageous act of doing the “right” thing led us to a simple act of doing the “write” thing. As she shared with us stories of her community life and ministry, we shared ours, ever more cognizant of how much freedom we had in contrast to Cynthia and the others who were imprisoned. We realize, after this experience, the challenge lies in deciding when we are being called to do the “right” thing and when we are called to do the “write” thing. No matter what is decided, it will be those little steps and those big steps that will lead us all to the next step of true freedom and lasting peace.

*For more information visit
the web site of the School of
the Americas Watch:*

www.soaw.org.

Janet McCann, ASC