

School of the Americas

Victories for the movement to Close the SOA!

- ✓ In February 2004, **Venezuelan** Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel announced that all training of Venezuelan soldiers at the School of the Americas would cease immediately.
- ✓ In April 2006, the governments of **Uruguay and Argentina** followed suit, announcing that they would not send any more soldiers to the SOA.
- ✓ In February 2008, the **Bolivian** government announced it would no longer send its soldiers to the SOA.
- ✓ In 2012, SOA Watch delegations met with the presidents of **Ecuador** (June) and **Nicaragua** (September), whose presidents both signed orders to stop sending soldiers to the SOA.
- ✓ Now it's President Obama's turn. After years of protests, nonviolent direct actions, thousands of petitions and bills before the US Congress, in September 2012 **President Obama's deputy national security advisor held a meeting with SOA Watch at the White House**, where torture survivors, faith and union leaders, Members of Congress and academics made our case why the president should—once and for all—close the SOA!

What is the School of Assassins?

Contrary to our government's "War on Terrorism" statements like "every known terrorist training camp must be shut down," the US has been training soldiers in terror tactics in Georgia for years. The Fort Benning-based School of the Americas (SOA), renamed WHINSEC in 2001 (Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), has been pumping out assassins, dictators, and death squad leaders to do the dirty work in Latin America for decades. Dubbed the "School of Assassins," it has left a trail of blood in countries where its graduates have returned.

The SOA/WHINSEC has trained more than 65,000 Latin American soldiers in courses such as counterinsurgency, psychological warfare, military intelligence, and interrogation tactics. Graduates have consistently suppressed popular social movements.

Among those targeted by SOA graduates are **teachers, union organizers, religious workers, student leaders, and others who work for the rights of the poor**. Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been **tortured, raped, assassinated, disappeared, massacred**.

In 1996, the grassroots movement to close the SOA forced the Pentagon to release its training manuals, which **advocated the use of torture, extortion, and execution**. The New York Times reported, "America can now read for themselves some of the noxious lessons the United States Army taught thousands of Latin Americans."

These SOA training manuals advocate targeting those who...

- support "union organizing or recruiting"
- distribute "propaganda in favor of the interest of workers"
- "sympathize with demonstrations or strikes"
- make "accusations that the government has failed to meet the basic needs of the people"

The purpose of the School of the Americas is, and has always been, to control the economic and political systems of Latin America through the military. Countries with the worst human rights records have consistently sent the most soldiers to the SOA: Bolivia (Banzer dictatorship); Nicaragua (Somoza dictatorship); El Salvador (1980s); Colombia (today).

Research Findings

While SOA and Pentagon officials would like the public to believe that atrocities have been committed by only a "few" SOA graduates, the reality is the vast majority of officers committing the worst human rights violations throughout Latin America have been soldiers who were trained at the SOA. A few examples:

United Nations Truth Commission Report on El Salvador

This report on El Salvador cites over 60 Salvadoran officers as committing the worst atrocities during that country's brutal civil war. Over 2/3 of those named were alumni of the SOA. For example:

- 3 of 5 cited for the murder of 4 US church women in 1980, including Cleveland's Jean Donovan and Ursuline Sister Dorothy Kazel.
- 2 of 3 cited for the assassination of Archbishop Romero in 1980.
- 10 of 12 cited for the massacre of over 900 at El Mozote in 1981.
- 19 of 26 cited for the assassination of 6 Jesuit priests in 1989.

State Terrorism in Colombia

A Human Rights Watch report is the definitive work on Colombian military officials responsible for violations in that country. Of the 247 cited, 124 were SOA graduates. For example:

- 3 cited for the Trujillo "chainsaw" massacre of 107 villagers.
- 9 cited for the Segovia massacre of 43, including children.
- 8 cited for the Urabá massacre of 20 striking banana workers.

Coup in Honduras

In June 2009 the democratically elected president of Honduras, Manuel Zelaya, was ousted in a military coup. Since then, state forces have murdered, tortured, beaten, and disappeared activists and others.

- 4 of 6 generals who orchestrated the coup were SOA graduates
- Juan Carlos "El Tigre" Bonilla is National Police Chief and an SOA graduate accused of running a death squad in the 1990s.



Close the School of the Americas!

Join the IRTF delegation from Ohio (and thousands from across the hemisphere!) at the gates of Fort Benning, Nov. 16-19, 2012.

The School of the Americas (aka SOA or WHINSEC) trains Latin American soldiers and officers in “counter-insurgency” warfare. SOA graduates have been linked to major human rights violations in Latin America for over 50 years. SOA soldiers murdered Cleveland church women Jean Donovan and Sister Dorothy Kazel in 1980 and numerous others since! There can be no healing and reconciliation without truth, an apology, and reparations to the thousands who have suffered from SOA violence and oppressive U.S. foreign policies. Each year we gather at the gates of Ft. Benning in Columbus, Georgia, and demand justice for the martyrs and for the thousands who continue to suffer the brutal consequences of the combat training at the SOA. **Don’t miss this largest and longest standing annual peace and justice gathering in the U.S!**

Outside the gates of Fort Benning, activities go on all weekend.

Sat., Nov 17: day: rally with live music, dance, speakers (including family members of SOA victims)
evening: workshops, films, worship service, networking caucuses, dance party

Sun, Nov 18: solemn funeral procession and street theatre to remember the victims, pledging “no more blood in our name!”

Details:

Depart from Cleveland : Friday, Nov. 16, 6pm

Return to Cleveland: Monday, Nov. 19, early morning
(Union bus drivers on Cleveland Southeastern Trails)

Cost:

\$199 (\$50 non-refundable deposit to reserve your seat due by Oct. 26)

Includes:

Close the SOA fair trade t-shirt, sample press release, round-trip bus travel, hotel stay in a 4-person room, \$15 donation to the scholarship fund, and training.

Training:

Saturday, Nov. 10, 9am-4pm. Free, but registration required. Venue to be announced. Nonviolence training, media outreach training, orientation on the SOA and the demilitarization movement. Overview of what to expect at the rally and vigil. We encourage all (but require first-timers) to attend.

Scholarships:

Limited. Email sarah@irtfcleveland.org for application.

InterReligious Task Force on Central America Close the SOA! Vigil 2012—Fort Benning, Georgia

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (home) _____

Phone (cell) _____

Email _____

School _____

Congregation _____

☐ I want to travel on the IRTF bus.

☐ Enclosed is \$_____.

☐ Please email me a scholarship application.

☐ I will **donate to IRTF’s scholarship fund** for students and others in financial need.

☐ I will sponsor ONE scholarship recipient (\$135).

☐ I will donate \$_____ towards a scholarship.

☐ I will participate in the nonviolence training on Nov 10.

☐ I would like to schedule an SOA video or speaker.

Make checks payable to IRTF and return with this form to:
IRTF, 3606 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44113
216.961.0003 ~ sarah@irtfcleveland.org ~ www.IRTFcleveland.org

