



SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS WATCH WEST

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PRESS ALERT

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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THREE FROM BAY AREA AMONG 43 HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS FACING FEDERAL CHARGES FOR CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AT SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS

TRIAL SET FOR JULY 8 IN COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

PRESS CONFERENCE: July 2, 2002, Tuesday, 11 AM, Federal Building, 450 Golden Gate Avenue (between Polk & Larkin), San Francisco. The three Bay Area SOA Watch defendants will deliver a statement to Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, a cosponsor of the bill to close the SOA/WHISC, at her office at 10AM. The three defendants will speak and answer questions from the press in front of the Federal Building at 11 AM just prior to their departure for Georgia to stand trial.

San Francisco - Three Bay Area SOA Watch activists, Fr. Louis Vitale, 70, Pastor of St. Boniface Church in San Francisco, Fr. Bill O'Donnell, 72, Vicar of St. Joseph the Worker Church in Berkeley, and Leone Reinbold, 24, from the Freedom Rising affinity group in Oakland, are among 43 protesters who were indicted in Federal Court this past April for trespassing onto Fort Benning, Georgia, home to the School of the Americas (renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation).

The 43 protesters were among 10,000 gathered last November to call for the closure of the notorious school. The defendants, who peacefully demonstrated on the grounds of Ft. Benning, face up to six months in federal prison and \$5,000 in fines.

Seventy-one people have served a total of over forty years in prison for engaging in nonviolent resistance in a broad-based campaign to close the school. Last year 26 people were prosecuted, including Dorothy Hennessey, an 88 year-old Franciscan nun, who was sentenced to six months in federal prison.

"Those who speak out for justice are facing harsh prison sentences while SOA-trained torturers and assassins are operating with impunity," said SOA Watch founder Fr. Roy Bourgeois.

The SOA/WHISC is a combat training school for Latin American soldiers. Its graduates are consistently involved in human rights abuses and atrocities. In 1996 the Pentagon was forced to release training manuals used at the school that advocated the use of torture, extortion and execution. In December 2000 Congress authorized the WHISC to replace the SOA. The renaming of the school was widely viewed as an attempt to diffuse public criticism and to disassociate the school from its reputation. SOA Watch maintains that the underlying purpose of the school, to control the economic and political systems of Latin America by aiding and influencing Latin American militaries, remains the same.

"The SOA is the terrorist training camp in our own backyard." *Roy Bourgeois*

SOA Watch stands in solidarity with the people of Latin America, and works to change oppressive US foreign policy and to close the SOA/WHISC.

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