



April 26th, 2006-The Eyes Wide Open Film Series presents:

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

(Produced by Vivi Letsou and John Smihula)

What is the School of the Americas (SOA)?

The School of the Americas is a U.S. Army training school that trains soldiers and military personnel from Latin American countries in subjects like counter-insurgency, military intelligence and counter-narcotics operations. Under the Department of Defense jurisdiction, this school is funded by U.S. taxpayer money, all of the training is conducted in Spanish and most of the classes are taught by L.A. instructors. The SOS reports that it has trained more than 60,000 members of Latin American militaries since its inception in 1946. First established in Panama to help “professionalize” Latin America and Caribbean militaries, the training center was moved to Fort Benning, Georgia in 1984 and given more of a Cold War focus.

What is School of the Americas (SOA) Watch?

SOA Watch is an independent organization that seeks to close the U.S. 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. Founded by Maryknoll priest Fr. Roy Bourgeois in 1990, there are currently five full-time SOA Watch staff members.

SOA/WHINSEC graduates have included some of the worst and most notorious human rights abusers in Latin American history. SOA graduates have led military coups and are responsible for the massacres of hundreds of people. Among SOA’s graduates are: notorious dictators like Manuel Noriega of Panama; Galtieri and Viola of Argentina; Alvarado of Peru;Rodriguez of Ecuador, and Suarez of Bolivia. SOA graduates were responsible for the Uraba massacre in Colombia, and in El Salvador the El Mozote massacre of 900 civilians, the assassination of Archbishop Romero, the massacre of 14 year old Celine Ramos,her mother Elba Ramos, and six Jesuit priests. Closing the SOA/WHINSEC would send a strong human rights message to Latin America and the rest of the world. For more information and how to help contact: www.soaw.org

Wasn’t the SOA closed?

The SOA was “closed” in December 2000 and “reopened” on January 17, 2001 with a new name, the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). This was the result of a narrow, ten vote margin, defeat of a bipartisan amendment to close the school and conduct a Congressional investigation. A comparison between the “old” school and the “new” school shows that changes are almost entirely cosmetic. In a media interview, a SOA supporter, the late Paul Coverdell, characterized the Department of Defense proposal as “cosmetic changes that would ensure that the SOA could continue its mission and operation.”

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