

I am a Catholic sister ?? a Sister of Mercy ?? and have been for nearly 40 years.

As a sister, my primary reason for taking part in the annual protest at the SOA is to honor the memory of Maura Clark, Ita Ford, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan. They knew the dangers of living in El Salvador yet recommitted themselves to staying with the people ?? and then were raped and murdered at the hands of SOA graduates. I also participate to honor the life of Sister Diana Ortiz ?? what makes her story unique is that she has lived to tell about her torture and rape, but at a tremendous emotional and psychological price. These are my sisters ?? whose names I know ?? and who should never have been tortured, raped, and in the case of the four, killed, by anyone, let alone by soldiers trained with U.S. taxpayer dollars.

I also participate in order to stand in solidarity with my friend Jennifer Harbury whose Guatemalan husband was tortured for two years and finally killed ?? by SOA grads. These are the ones I know ?? yet for each one there are hundreds of indigenous people who remain unnamed and have suffered and died at the hands of SOA graduates.

I took this action as an act of conscience. As a Sister of Mercy I believe I must answer to, and abide by, a higher law ?? that of God and of my congregation. As our Holy Rule states: We as Sisters of Mercy, freely respond to a call to serve the needy of our time ?? we commit ourselves to follow Jesus Christ in his compassion for suffering people. Recalling the words of Jesus, that he is one with his suffering members, we respond to the cry of the poor. Through direct service and through our influence, we seek to relieve misery, and to address its causes.

I believe the School of the Americas IS the cause of much of the misery and violence suffered by our sisters and brothers in Latin America. It is obvious that the training done at the SOA is intended to be used against civilians. What Central American country has been invaded by a foreign power? A good example is that Mexico never sent soldiers to the SOA until the uprising of the poor people of Chiapas, who were merely seeking their civil rights. Since then hundreds of Mexican soldiers have been sent to the School every year.

Yes, the SOA may have changed its name, but the best evidence to the fact that nothing has changed is the comment by the late Paul Coverdell, senator from Georgia, who said ""The School of the Americas would still be able to continue its purpose."" In the same interview, he called the changes to the SOA ""basically cosmetic.""

I am grateful for this opportunity to give witness to this truth of my conscience ?? in my heart I broke no law, but I was faithful to the law of God and of my congregation. I pray that the truth and nonviolence will prevail and the Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation will be closed and the atrocities stopped. I find it ironic that peaceful protesters are imprisoned and the atrocities we protest against are allowed to continue.