

Seven Steps to Local Media Coverage

As your group organizes car caravans, buses, and plane rides to travel to Fort Benning this November, think and plan ahead about how to educate people in your community about the School of the Americas, why you are going to Fort Benning, and why they should get involved. One useful tool for getting the word out and working to frame the issue is the media.

Media coverage of the annual vigil in Ft. Benning, GA, as well as local and national media coverage at trials of those charged for "crossing the line" or other acts of civil disobedience to close the SOA/ WHINSEC is growing. Organizing media work around such events is a popular way of using the print, radio, and television outlets to get the word out. In order to do this for the 2007 November Vigil, we need to first assess where we are and then strengthen local media work.



Seven steps for your group to consider:

1) Assess where you are now. What has been your track record of local print and broadcast coverage? Do you need to learn or brush up on media skills? Who has been your spokesperson/s so far? Have new people become involved who could take on that role? *Is everyone prepared to make a statement about why s/he is participating in this movement?* Who are sympathetic editors and reporters? Which print and broadcast editors and reporters need some education?

2) Find a local "hook." What is it about your group that is connected to the local community? If you are involved in a local group/organization it is important to mention your involvement in that group. An example would be: A Rosa House Peace Community/ Fellowship of Reconciliation delegation's press release in 1998 identified the members as educators (in schools and community-based) who carried signs that urged "Teach Peace" and "Close this School," and they were quoted as linking violence in schools with US government violence.

3) Use independent and alternative media. IndyMedia web sites at www.indymedia.org give all of us the opportunity to post stories and photos in our own words. Go to the web site nearest you and fill in the blanks! Are there alternative newspapers and/or radio programs in your area? Does your information appear in religious, labor and community newsletters? This requires some research on your part to search for those local media outlets that would be most likely to cover your story.



4) Tie in with national media. List the SOA Watch national office phone number (202-234 3440) underneath a local phone number at the top of your press releases, and cite www.soaw.org/newsroom as a source for more information.

5) Varied and simultaneous submissions. All of your media work doesn't need to be a major press release or statement. Submit regular, brief announcements of organizing meetings, bus or van trip availability, educational resources (speakers' bureau or videos). Send to city desk, community news and religion editors. Remember weekly bulletins of houses of worship, union publications and community newsletters.

6) Some go, some stay. It is important to develop a comprehensive list of everyone from your area who is traveling to Fort Benning with their names, ages, occupations and religious affiliations to attach to your press release. People who can't go to Fort Benning should organize a support event and have media spokespeople available (and be pro-active, making press calls) throughout the week to increase your chances of local coverage of the national action

7) Call home! Don't lose the story after the trip and actions. As you set out for home, your local media outlets are getting the story from our media team over the network feeds and wire services. Plan to call them with news of your local group and increase your chances for a longer, more accurate story. You can arrange for this before you leave, or (even better!) your stay-at-home media support team can set up interviews. Your Fort Benning media team checks in to find out which local outlets are interested and what they have covered so far. Be prepared with cell phones and/or pre-paid calling cards.

Planning Your Media Work

The schedule for your work will depend on local plans and progress, but a suggested timeline is:

- **August:** assess media work to date, where you have had coverage and where you need further outreach. Develop a comprehensive list of media outlets and be sure to note copy deadlines.
- **Late September and early October:** announce local participation in the national action; how to contact your local SOA Watch group; road shows, speakers, videos.
- **Late October and early November:** keep your organizing newsworthy by hosting a speaker, creating a mock cemetery, puppet parade or other visual event. Announce additional local/regional organizational endorsements and growing travel plans. Seek out a related feature story on nonviolence training, puppet or banner making. Plan your local media support actions for the Spring Mobilization and Lobby Days.
- **Early to mid November:** build the momentum by releasing numbers of citizens traveling to Washington, DC, some key or influential people in your local delegation, and the comprehensive list. Finalize plans for getting the news back home. And do it!



Contact the communications coordinator in the SOA Watch DC office with questions, feedback or to volunteer in the Columbus Media Office during the Vigil weekend. Email media@soaw.org or call 202-234-3440.