

Every Protester Forced to Undergo Search

Military and Columbus Police Collaborate in Harassment, Intimidation

Columbus, GA, 1:50PM ? The U.S. Military is blasting anthems and marshal music at high decibels from inside Ft. Benning, directed at a peaceful, permitted demonstration outside of the gates of the base. The military is attempting to drown out an annual vigil to close the School of the Americas, renamed Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (SOA/WHISC), the notorious combat-training school for Latin Americans.

The technique of blasting loud music, as a ?psychological operation?, has been used by militaries around the world, for example to drive SOA-graduate Manuel Noriega out of sanctuary in Panama, and by Israel during the 2002 siege of the Church of the Nativity.

Meanwhile Columbus Police are using metal detectors to search every person attending the demonstration. The City of Columbus has set up a perimeter and demonstrators must enter and exit through access points. Last year Columbus Police took an action that had until then been unprecedented in the United States when they forced people to undergo searches as a condition for their participation in a public demonstration. Late last week, SOA Watch and the ACLU filed an emergency brief with the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in an attempt to get them to rule on the appeal from the 2002 mass-searches, and to enjoin the police from searching today. There has been no response from the Court.

?We will not allow these blatantly unconstitutional attempts to drown out our voices,? said Bill Quigley, a professor of law at Loyola Law School, and lawyer for SOA Watch. ?These childish actions by the federal, state and local government only strengthen our resolve to stand up for our rights and all the victims of the School of the Americas.?

Thousands are taking nonviolent direct action this weekend to close what they call a terrorist training camp on U.S. soil ? the SOA/WHISC. Nuns, priests, veterans, unionists, students and others are gathered outside the gates of Fort Benning, Georgia ? home of the school. SOA grads continue to be implicated in egregious acts designed to terrorize and coerce civilian populations throughout Latin America. Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been tortured, raped, assassinated, ?disappeared?, massacred, and forced into refuge by SOA graduates.