# Moving the Vigil to DC?

Ad your opinion about the proposal to move the 2010 November Vigil from Fort Benning, Georgia to Washington, DC.

November 2009 marks the 20th anniversary of the massacre of 14-year-old Celina Ramos, her mother Elba Ramos, and six Jesuit priests at the University of Central America in San Salvador. The movement to close the SOA will gather for the annual November Vigil in 2009 at the gates of Fort Benning in Georgia, to commemorate the victims of the SOA/WHINSEC, to call for the closure of the school and to demand a change in foreign policy.

Vermont SOA Watch has proposed to move the following November vigil (2010) to Washington, DC, if the school has not been closed by then. The proposal has initiated a dialogue within the movement about the vigil location and about the best strategies for our campaign. What do you think?

Dolores Perez Priem
SOA Watch West

"Yes, I like that idea. There seems to be less national media coverage of the annual Fort Benning event anymore. With a new administration, we should make ourselves more prominent at our nation's capital, since that is where the policy is made, and only through a policy change will this military training school be closed! It has many possibilities."

Francisco Herrera
Trabajo Cultural Caminante

" We have been committed with Ft. huachuca during the last two years, but had not been able to be there on the acutal date as we have been going to benning. However, because of schedules this year we will be able to be at both. Ft. Huachuca, as many of you know, is the place where the imfamous torture manuals used at benning were created. It is also the place from where Abu Graib has been run since the u.s. invasion of iraq in 03. It is also the central listening headquarters of all military personell calling there families from around the world and the training ground for "interogators," around the world. It is a very important place for us to be witnessing and makes sense for the connection between benning and huachuca to grow. "

Gail Taylor
Farmworker from DC

"Until the SOA/WHINSEC closes, we should continue to have a presence at the school. Converging at Fort Benning, where the killers are being trained sends a powerful message that they will be held accountable.

On one hand, I think that the work that happens in DC is important, and we should continue to come every year to Washington to lobby our Members of Congress and demand that funding for the school be cut. As a movement, we could also discuss how many resources go into planning the fall event in Ft. Benning and the spring event in DC. Perhaps we would reach the conclusion that a balance needs to be found so that more emphasis and effort is put to pushing the legislative strategy forward, since it is currently very strong.

Nevertheless, I think moving the vigil would be a bad idea. We cannot abandon the possibilities that space offers for remembrance, accountability, and the solemnity that is apart from any one tactic. Whether direct action or legislative action or whatever else we pursue, we go back to that place to show that we have not forgotten. We can do something different in another space, but we cannot bring our ritual to another place.

I think that there is an opportunity for us to show maturity and wisdom as part of a broader social justice movement rooted in grassroots strength. We might be able to reflect on the last 20 years of SOA Watch organizing and make strategic decisions about how the vigil is organized and presented publicly, so that we are not so worried about our numbers being the most important thing. None of us can say that our lives weren't transformed by being in that place. Every year we participate in a ritual that reminds us of what the SOA/WHINSEC has given to the world. And there is an open invitation for people to come into the circle and remember the pain and suffering in their own, creative way. That space is sacred, lobbying is quite separate from that."

Lorraine Krofchok

Grandmothers for Peace "A DC protest will be just another protest in a very, very large stew pot of protests in DC. Ft. Benning was/is unique. If the focus is changing, well, that is another issue. Also be reminded that the weather in DC at the end of November is cold. Yes we "sacrifice", but then some of us cannot really tolerate the extreme cold for long periods of time. True, GA sometimes is cold and rainy, but other times it is tolerable November in DC is cold, period. And the price of accommodations is much higher in DC than in Columbus, along with mobility problems. Unless things drastically change in our government not much would be accomplished with a move closer to them.

An action at Ft Huachuca, AZ would again call attention to the issues and be a unique location. Fort Benning is the focus on where the murderers were trained. While moving to DC where the symbol of our "democracy" is, I fear a loss of purpose and yes, maybe tradition until SOA is closed. I attended the early protests, from 1996 to 1999 when we came back to CA. Since I have not been back to Benning, the location is not the issue with me--just the idea of the movement changing. To leave Ft. Benning is defeating the purpose of why we vigil at the gates. To think that some members of Congress might wander out, well if they REALLY wanted, they could come to Benning. "

Joshua Cade Harris
Religious scholar

" I don't think this has to be an either/or issue. My hope is that, in the coming years, the movement to close the School of the Americas will mobilize and congregate at multiple sites around the US. I feel it is important to maintain a presence at Ft. Benning and all of the military bases that play a role in training torture techniques. That being said, I am excited at the prospect of taking the message to DC in a massive mobilization that will allow for new opportunities of direct action and pressure politics."