

The following letter was faxed to all of the Democratic candidates running for president.

January 14, 2004

Dear [Candidate's Name]:

School of the Americas Watch is seeking statements from all of the Democratic candidates for President of the United States regarding your position on the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHISC or WHINSEC), formerly the United States Army School of the Americas (SOA). SOA Watch is a nonviolent grassroots movement that works to stand in solidarity with the people of Latin America, to close the SOA/WHISC. There are currently over 200 SOAW grassroots groups nationally, hundreds of groups that work on the SOA as a primary issue, as well as many other organizations and constituency groups with whom we work closely.

In response to grassroots and media inquiries following the appearance of an article in the NY Post on General Clark's support of the school, we are providing information on the positions of the presidential candidates on this issue. The Kucinich campaign has already publicly opposed the SOA/WHISC and stated that he would close it down. All of this information will be posted on the web and has already been sent to our email list of over 20,000 nationally. We wanted to alert your campaign to the media coverage and invite you to issue a statement so that we may educate our networks on your position. If you collect any articles that are appropriate we would encourage you to send those as well.

Despite efforts to evade criticism of the Ft. Benning-based training school through a name change and cosmetic changes, it is still a combat training school that provides dangerous skills to countries with serious and current human rights problems. The proliferation of skills like counter-insurgency and psychological warfare in countries like Colombia, where impunity is offered to paramilitaries, only perpetuates the cycles of violence. Keeping the school open under any name sends a powerful anti-human rights message. Establishing reasonable living conditions for the people of Latin America and strengthening civil institutions will do more to stabilize the region than training repressive militaries.

The graduates of this institution have a long history of human rights violations. From the atrocities in El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980's to recent violations in Colombia, SOA/WHISC graduates consistently appear in reports on human rights abuses in Latin America. SOA/WHISC training has resulted in civilian massacres, assassinations, disappearances, death threats and has led to both attempted and successful coups of democratically elected governments in the hemisphere. Closing the SOA/WHISC, whatever its name, would demonstrate that the United States has made a clean break from the tragic history of the SOA/WHISC and its graduates.

We urge you to demonstrate your commitment to human rights in Latin America, and all over the world, by voicing your commitment to close the SOA/WHISC. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-234-3440, jbaker@soaw.org. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Baker
Legislative Coordinator