

THE CASE FOR CLOSING THE SOA/ WHINSEC

Overview: The School of the Americas (SOA), now renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC), is a U.S. Army training school that trains military personnel and civilians from Latin American countries in subjects like counter-insurgency, military intelligence and counter-narcotics operations. Under Department of Defense jurisdiction, this school is funded by U.S. taxpayer money, the training is conducted in Spanish, and Latin American instructors teach most of the classes. According to SOA/ WHINSEC, more than 60,000 members of Latin American militaries have attended the SOA since its inception in 1946.

The SOA/ WHINSEC has a notorious history and the continued existence of the school has a negative impact on U.S. foreign policy. After numerous revelations of questionable tactics and associations, such as the Pentagon's public disclosure of torture manuals being used at the school and hundreds of human rights abusers participating in their programs, the school was renamed. The only effect from the renaming of the school was the implementation of a public relations campaign to justify the continuation of their programs – no substantial changes have been made since Congress called for its closure in 2000 and no independent investigation has ever taken place.

The case for closing the SOA/ WHINSEC continues to grow:

- **SOA/ WHINSEC is immoral** – The school's graduates are responsible for the assassinations and torture of tens of thousands of people in Latin America. Among the alumni are notorious dictators, including Manuel Noriega of Panama, and graduates are responsible for the Uraba massacre in Colombia, the El Mozote massacre of 900 civilians in El Salvador, the San Jose de Apartado massacre in Colombia, assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the massacre of 14-year-old Celina Ramos, her mother Elba Ramos and six Jesuit priests in El Salvador, as well as hundreds of incidents of torture and hundreds of other human rights abuses. Recent graduates and instructors continue to be implicated in serious crimes and independent research has confirmed that known human rights abusers attended the school.
- **SOA/ WHINSEC damages U.S. credibility** – Latin America is walking away from the SOA/ WHINSEC and the United States. Uruguay, Costa Rica, Venezuela, Argentina and Bolivia have all made public announcements they will no longer send their soldiers to the school. In visits with Presidents and Defense Ministers, they specifically cited the SOA/ WHINSEC as sending a negative human rights message to Latin America and they no longer wished to associate with the U.S. military training program.
- **SOA/ WHINSEC is opposed by major U.S.-based organizations** – Numerous organizations actively oppose the school, have passed resolutions calling for its closure, and continue to lobby Congress to defund, investigate, and close the school. This includes 167 U.S. Catholic Bishops, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA, Unitarian Universalism Church, Lutheran Church, NAACP, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), United Auto Workers (UAW), the AFL-CIO, AFSCME, the United Steelworkers and the United Electrical Workers. Hundreds of human rights organizations are also in agreement.
- **SOA/ WHINSEC lacks oversight and accountability** – Previously, 58 years of graduate and instructor information was provided to human rights organizations through FOIA and informal requests, limited to only name, rank, country of origin, and dates and classes attended at the school and not private information. After the renaming of the school, and the revelation that known human rights abusers continued to attend WHINSEC's classes based on research from those FOIA disclosures, all requests for information have been denied. The SOA/ WHINSEC refuses to implement a tracking mechanism of their graduates, and now they prevent tracking from independent research by human rights groups.

The SOA/ WHINSEC is a relic of the Cold War, based on an outdated philosophy that military assistance and training are the cornerstone of our relationship and foreign policy with Latin America. As long as the SOA/ WHINSEC remains open, countries will continue to view our foreign policy with their nations as one not based on humanitarian or much needed development assistance, but one linked to an institution that subverts human rights. It's time for a change.

Support human rights: Join your bipartisan colleagues and become a cosponsor of **HR 2567, the Latin America Military Training Review Act** that would suspend operations at the SOA/ WHINSEC and investigate torture manuals and human rights abuses associated with the school. To cosponsor, please contact Cindy Buhl in Rep. McGovern's office at (202) 225-6101.