

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

November 26, 2013 at 10:39am

In honor of the SOA victims: 'No más! No more!'

by John Dear

On the Road to Peace

Thousands gathered over the weekend in Columbus, Ga., to pray, study, reflect, network, remember and march to the gates of the notorious School of the Americas, the U.S. training camp for Latin American militaries and death squads, officially called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. It was both heartbreaking and heartening, a time of grief and a time of joy.

Speakers came from around Latin America to tell us about ongoing U.S. militarism, human rights violations, poverty and injustice. More than 70 workshops were held on topics that included the various struggles in Latin America and the ongoing U.S. drone warfare.

But the hope and joy came from meeting old and new friends and finding new strength for the struggle for justice and disarmament. I sat in on the Pace e Bene workshop on nonviolence; offered my own workshop based on my new book, *The Nonviolent Life*; and took part in the public reading of "Project Unspeakable" about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

The highlight every year comes Sunday morning, when everyone solemnly processes up to the SOA gates in a memorial service for the SOA victims. The names of hundreds of Latin Americans killed by SOA-trained soldiers were read from the stage. After each name, everyone called out, "*Presente!*"

This year, we also heard a litany of grief, a kind of prayers of the faithful. After each intercession, we sang, "*No más! No more!*" I was moved by this SOA Watch litany, and offer it here below with their permission to share the spirit of the weekend, the news from Latin America, and the need for ongoing prayers to end systemic injustice and war. For photos from the weekend and further information, go to soaw.org.

In Mexico, a repression campaign in the name of the "War on Drugs" is being unleashed against the people who are struggling for direct democracy and justice. 60,000 people have been killed in the past six years. At least 18 high-ranking SOA graduates have played key roles in civilian-targeted warfare against indigenous communities in the states of Chiapas, Guerrero and Oaxaca. Perpetrators of violence on all sides of the "drug war" have received weapons and military training from the U.S. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Colombia, they have sent more troops to the SOA/WHINSEC than any other country. Since 2002 alone, over 35,000 have been killed and the number of internally displaced has risen to around 6 million. Over 10,000 Colombian soldiers have been trained at the school and linked to many assassinations and disappearances. Reports show that 30 of the 33 Colombia Army Brigade commanders were trained at the SOA, with increased extrajudicial executions in areas under SOA-trained commanders' control. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Honduras, over 400 members of the resistance movement have been killed since a June 28, 2009, SOA graduate-led military coup, and hundreds more forced into exile, beaten or detained by police. Death squads terrorize villages resisting land displacement in the lower Aguan Valley. Pre-election violence continues to intensify, with 18 murders and 15 armed attacks against candidates of the LIBRE party, which is led by deposed President Zelaya's wife Xiomara Castro. As Hondurans go to the polls on Sunday, we stand behind their striving for the restoration of democracy. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Guatemala, the SOA played a key role in the three brutal military dictatorships that ruled Guatemala from 1978 to 1986. SOA graduates comprised four of eight military officials in the cabinet of Lucas Garcia, six out of nine under Rios Montt, and five out of 10 under Mejia Victores. The brutal SOA counterinsurgency strategies that were implemented in Guatemala left over 200,000 people dead. In a triumph of justice, the people of Guatemala placed Rios Montt on trial for genocide. But the struggle for justice is not yet finished. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Paraguay, during the 32 long years of repression and iron-fisted dictatorship by General Alfredo Stroessner, over 18,000 people were tortured, nearly 20,000 illegally detained in hidden cells, and hundreds forever disappeared. Today, nearly 2 million Paraguayans live in external exile, having fled the fearful violence of dictatorship and Plan Condor, while yet more are internally exiled due to the decades of economic violence. In June 2012, the democratically elected president of Paraguay, Liberation Theology Bishop Fernando Lugo, was removed in an "express coup" set in motion in a conflict over land with one of the richest landowners in the country. Meanwhile, the right to protest these events is being criminalized. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

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In Argentina, SOA graduate Leopoldo Galtieri headed the military junta that ruled the country. Throughout the entirety of the Dirty War, 30,000 people were killed or disappeared. As the trials against Plan Condor move through the justice system, the role of high-ranking officials in the Southern Cone and the U.S. are being charged with complicity. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Chile, 10 of the officers indicted with Pinochet for crimes against humanity were trained at the SOA. Thousands were victims of the Doctrine of National Security, promoted by the SOA, and also taught to

the police. Today, this doctrine continues to produce victims, such as the Mapuche leader Jaime Mendoza Collio and student Manuel Gutierrez. In honor of those lost 40 years ago in the coup against President Salvador Allende, we cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In El Salvador, SOA graduates killed Celia Ramos, her mother, Elba, and six Jesuit priests at the University of Central America in San Salvador on Nov. 16, 1989. Next month marks the 31st anniversary of the SOA graduate-led massacre of over 900 civilians in the village of El Mozote, and the killing of four U.S. churchwomen on Dec. 2, 1980. Today, the U.S. is pushing again for increased militarization in El Salvador and Central America, and attempting to subvert the democratic process using Cold War-era tactics. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Nicaragua, over 4,000 soldiers were trained at the SOA for Somoza's National Guard death squads. For all the victims that died during the Somoza dictatorship, to the student protesters, the journalists and campesinos that were killed during the 45 years of rule, and to all the families that sought for a better Nicaragua, we cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Venezuela, in April 2002, graduates of the SOA were key players in an attempted coup against the democratically elected government. Democracy prevailed as the people took to the streets. One hundred people died in the violence during the coup attempt. In the wake of the death of Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez in March of this year, social violence broke out in response to the elections which brought President Nicolas Maduro into office. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Haiti in January 2010, a deadly earthquake struck, killing hundreds of thousands and displacing many more, in both a natural and unnatural disaster leaving Haiti under a U.S.- and UN-orchestrated occupation and an unjust distribution of aid. As the UN forces ready themselves for yet another occupation of Haiti, we cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Pakistan, Somalia, and Yemen, U.S. drone bombings have increased exponentially. Close to 3,000 people -- 175 of them children -- have been killed from such bombings. To the victims of suffering from U.S. militarism, we cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In the United States, Congress approved over a trillion dollars for military operations while 36 million people inside our borders do not have enough to eat, 3 million are homeless and over 2 million people are locked in cages. Students unable to pay for college have to turn to the military in order to support their families. Laws attempt to criminalize immigrants who come to this country looking for a better life, many of whom have left their countries as a result of oppressive military policies and economic policies that destroy their communities. Across the nation, the racist system of exploitation and oppression that has defined U.S. immigration policy for centuries is growing in the form of detention centers, inundation of local police forces by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the war on the border grows to fever pitch. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In Syria, broiling in civil war which is intensified by external support of the insurgents, the Obama administration revealed its sanguinary determination to "secure U.S. interests." U.S. attacks on the Syrian people have been thwarted this time, but the horrors of the conflict have not yet subdued. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

In the vast continent of Africa, the U.S. military gang AFRICOM continues Operation Africa Endeavor to suppress popular movements, union organizers, environmentalist, and people who have fought against the exploitation of their homelands. We cry, "*No más! No more!*"

May love and mercy go with you as you speak in solidarity with those who have been silenced by death

and repression. Through your witness, may their voices be heard here at the SOA, in the White House, in the halls of Congress and in the hearts of people across the Americas so that the School of the Americas will be closed forever and we can begin to abolish war and injustice and welcome a new world of justice, nonviolence and peace.

[John Dear's new book, *The Nonviolent Life*, is available at paceebene.org and Amazon.com. To join his work with Campaign Nonviolence, contact the Franciscan-based peace group Pace e Bene. Next year, John will undertake a four-month-long national speaking tour about *The Nonviolent Life* and Campaign Nonviolence. *Lazarus, Come Forth!* and John's other recent books, including *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings*, *Put Down Your Sword* and *A Persistent Peace*, are available from Amazon.com. For more information, go to John's website.]

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