



# Pilgrimage of Resistance

Every November

Every year, a caravan sets out from Canada on an inspiring road-trip journey to the gates of a notorious base at Fort Benning, Georgia—joining over 25,000 others.

We call it ‘pilgrimage’: we visit communities of resistance & faith in the USA, learn about issues of justice in our home contexts, oppression & nonviolent dissent, and form friendships and networks to help transform our world.

All are welcome: we are from diverse backgrounds, including activists, students of faith, anti-oppression organizers, and refugees with first-hand experience of the SOA. Vigils are held at home in solidarity with the pilgrims.

[scmcanada.org/pilgrimage](http://scmcanada.org/pilgrimage)

## STUDENT CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT OF CANADA



Since 1921, the SCM has brought together students passionate about justice, community & spirituality, from across and beyond the churches.

We engage the prophetic teachings of the revolutionary Jesus of Nazareth. As an ecumenical (inter-denominational) movement, we include people of many beliefs. All are welcome, regardless of background. No dogma, we promise!

[www.scmcanada.org](http://www.scmcanada.org)



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# close the school of the americas



# Pilgrimage of Resistance

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“ The annual convergence on Fort Benning has become not only a protest, but also a time for networking and organizing community, solidarity, spiritual reflection and a time to remember those killed. It is in this space where we can begin to envision alternatives. ”

- Pat, pilgrimage participant

**The Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation**—formerly the School of the Americas—was founded during the Cold War to battle communism in Latin America.

In half a century, graduates from its base at Fort Benning, Georgia (USA) have been accused of grave human rights abuses, massacres, torture and assassination against church people, unionists, students and indigenous people.

What is the SOA? Why do more than 20,000 people journey every year to its gates demanding its closure? How can you get involved? We hope this pamphlet will help answer some of these questions.

“ The pilgrimage was a life-altering path that both challenged and enriched my faith... It also allowed me to symbolically take a stand against violence in its many forms. ”

- Meagan, pilgrimage participant

## WHAT IS THE SOA?

*"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* - Matthew 5:10

ONE ACTION CAN LEAD TO BIG RIPPLES. Fr. Ray Bourgeois, a U.S. priest, was outraged when 6 Jesuits were massacred in El Salvador along with a house-keeper and her teenage daughter.

Bourgeois decided to do something—he climbed a tree inside the U.S. army base that had trained the killers, and broadcast the last sermon of an archbishop also killed by SOA grads (see box).

That same weekend each year, the procession to the SOA's gates has grown to 26,000 and rising. People around the world are demanding that SOA close forever, and are calling for U.S. foreign policies based on justice and peace.

A UNITED NATIONS TRUTH COMMISSION INVESTIGATING massacres and assassinations cited 50 SOA grads as human rights abusers—in El Salvador alone. There are hundreds of other killings reported, not to mention dozens of countries in which SOA trains officers. Numbers killed are in brackets:

**Oscar Romero** assassination (see box): 3 of 5 officers were SOA graduates

Murder of **US nuns** (3): 3 of 5 officers, SOA grads

**Union leaders** killed (3): 3 of 3, SOA grads

El Junquillo **massacre**: 2 of 3, SOA grads

El Mazote **massacre** (900): 10 of 12, SOA grads

Dutch **journalist** murders (3): 1 officer, SOA grad

Las Hojas **massacre** (16): 3 of 6, SOA grads

San Sebastian **massacre** (10): 6 of 7, SOA grads

Jesuit **priests** massacre (8): 19 of 26, SOA grads

THE MOVEMENT TO CLOSE THE SOA (SINCE RENAMED WHINSEC) is growing every year. It faces nonviolent protests of tens of thousands, civil disobedience, and a solidarity movement unlike any for decades.

### Isn't the USA fighting terrorism?

You only have to take a quick look at history to see that, behind its freedom-and-democracy rhetoric, Western governments' foreign policies are soaked in blood.

Most US citizens would be horrified to learn that their government overthrew dozens of democratically elected governments and propped up dictatorships—all in the name of protecting U.S. interests and the economic system.

### EXAMPLES OF ABUSES LINKED TO SOA:

#### EL MOZOTE MASSACRE

**El Salvador, 1981** > Salvadoran armed forces killed an estimated 900 civilians in an anti-guerrilla campaign reputed to be the worst such atrocity in modern Latin American history. As news of the massacre slowly emerged, the U.S. Reagan administration dismissed it as propaganda because it undermined efforts to support the

El Salvador dictatorship, which the US was supporting with large amounts of military aid and investment.

#### SAN JOSE MARTYRS

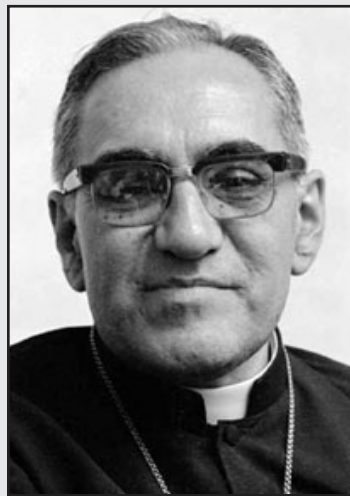
**Columbia, 2005** > 8 members of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community in Uraba, including three young children, were brutally massacred by a platoon commanded by an SOA graduate. "Today we are here talking; tomorrow we may be dead" (peace activist Luis Eduardo Guerra, two weeks before he was killed).

#### TRAINING TYRANTS

**Latin America** > SOA graduates went on to become infamous dictators, causing the 'disappearance' and murder of tens of thousands: Omar Torrijos (Panama), Guillermo Rodriguez (Ecuador), Juan Velasco Alvarado (Peru), Leopoldo Galtieri (Argentina), et al. In 1996, the *Washington Post* revealed that SOA training manuals contained detailed instructions on torture, blackmail and targeting civilians.

## OSCAR ROMERO (1917 - MARCH 24, 1980)

*Romero, Archbishop of El Salvador, was killed because of his outspoken opposition to human rights abuses in his country, carried out by a U.S.-backed military dictatorship. It was later revealed that Romero's assassins had been trained at the School of the Americas. His liberation theology of solidarity with the poor continues to inspire:*



**"Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty."**

**"Brothers, you came from our own people. You are killing your own brothers. Any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God, which says, 'Thou shalt not kill'... No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you obeyed your consciences rather**

**than sinful orders. The church cannot remain silent before such an abomination... In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cry rises to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you: stop the repression!"** -23 March 1980

### Does Canada have a role?

Although the SOA is a U.S. institution, there are some direct and indirect connections to Canada. The Canadian military supports WHINSEC's operations by sending officers to study there.

Canada also contributes to human rights abuses overseas in several ways. We are, for instance, a major base for multinational mining and resource corporations linked to rights abuses around the world—especially where locals oppose environmental damage around mines and are killed (more info at [www.dev.org](http://www.dev.org)). Such abuses can be linked to SOA-trained officers today.

With our own history of suppressing Indigenous peoples and movements, Canada's hands are certainly not clean. It is time to journey in solidarity with our oppressed sisters and brothers at home and abroad.



*"Many of the critics [of the SOA] supported Marxism—Liberation Theology—which was defeated with the assistance of the U.S. Army." (OFFICIAL SOA WEBSITE, 1999)*