

JULY 17, 2001

STATEMENT OF U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY IN SUPPORT OF ANTI SCHOOL OF THE AMERICA ACTIVISTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - I stand in solidarity with the 19 courageous peacemakers who will enter the Pekin, IL federal prison and nine other federal prisons around the country for their nonviolent opposition to the School of the Americas (SOA). It is a travesty of justice when, here in the United States, we jail nuns, teachers, health care workers and union organizers who peacefully raise their voices to call for closure of an institution which so clearly runs counter to the basic democratic principles that Americans cherish dearly. It is our duty to speak out when we learn that human rights are being violated-particularly when it is being done in our name, with our tax dollars.

Thanks to the work of these 19 activists, Roy Bourgeois, and so many others, the truth about the violence taught at the School of the Americas has come to light in the last several years. As Congress learned about the School of the Americas and the human rights violations committed by its graduates, Congressional support for closing the School has grown exponentially. In 1999 the House voted to cut the funding for the SOA. The Pentagon responded to this vote with a smoke and mirrors campaign to keep the School open. This campaign culminated six months ago with the SOA name-change. This effort to disassociate the School from its horrific history has not fooled Congress. My colleagues and I recently introduced H.R. 1810 to permanently close the School of the Americas, or the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation as it is now called. I am committed to closing this school of violence, no matter the name.

I, along with all activists, including Dave Corcoran of Des Plaines, IL, the four SOA Watch activists already in prison, and those who will soon begin serving their unjust prison sentences, stand with the people of Latin America who have suffered so much and for so many years by soldiers who learned their violent and inhumane skills at the SOA. In particular, we stand in solidarity with the people of Colombia who suffer and die each day at the hands of the U.S. funded and trained soldiers.

When Father Roy began calling for the closure of the SOA in 1990, he had just returned from El Salvador where he saw great numbers of people dying at the hands of SOA graduates. I recently returned from Colombia where I also witnessed the deadly effects of the 10,000 Colombian soldiers trained at the School of the Americas.

What message are we sending to the militaries and governments of Latin America when we jail those who speak out for justice? Those heroes, who will soon spend months behind bars for speaking out against violence, are symbols of a movement that is growing daily and will continue to grow until the School of the Americas is closed. They have our support, the support of thousands of people throughout the nation and the

world, and the growing support of members of Congress.