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viewpoint BY PEG MORTON

Starving for Change

A fast in protest of militarism in Latin America

My name is Peg Morton and I am from Eugene. I am a Quaker, now 80 years old, and have been committed to closing the SOA/WHINSEC (School of the Americas/Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation) for many years. I have previously fasted on the steps of my hometown federal building for two weeks, have lobbied, and have attended the giant demonstrations at Fort Benning for about 10 years. I crossed the line at Fort Benning and served three months in a federal prison.



Why am I so committed to this SOA Watch movement to close the school and end the expansion of militarism in Latin America? In 1987 I traveled to Nicaragua to stand with the people in the war zone. In 1989, while I was studying Spanish in Guatemala, five Jesuit priests were massacred in El Salvador, and Sister Diana Ortiz, who had studied at my Spanish language school, was kidnapped and brutally tortured. In the 1990s I traveled to Guatemala to accompany some of the thousands of returning refugees, and to participate in the first anniversary of the assassination of the courageous human rights Bishop Juan Gerardi. Later, I traveled to Chiapas in southern Mexico after the Acteal Massacre by paramilitaries of a group, called the Abejas, who were committed to nonviolence.

In 2006 I traveled to Colombia to a rural peace community, San Jose de Apartado, to honor one of its leaders who had been assassinated along with his family. While there we visited the crowded, dangerous barrio near the top of a mountain outside of Bogota, where thousands of Afro-Colombians live, displaced from their small farms along the Pacific Coast, so that large plantations of African palms could be planted.

Each time that I traveled south, as I met and learned from courageous survivors of these atrocities, I became more deeply aware of the role of the U.S. government. The U.S. military trains and works in coordination with Latin American militaries to enforce economic trade and other policies that benefit international corporations as they seek natural resources and profits, killing thousands and driving millions from their lands. My experiences live in my heart and will never go away.

In recent years, I have devoted my attention to the notorious School of the Americas, which has trained Latin American militaries to torture and massacre. To this day, graduates of this school are committing atrocities and undermining democratic movements, for example in Honduras and in Colombia. I am honored to be a part of a struggle that is committed to nonviolence, which will increase the presence of love in the world.

Peg Morton of Eugene is participating in SOA Watch Fast, April 4 to 10, a "Fast for Peace and Justice and to End Militarization: Hungry for Justice, Starving for Change."

WORKING THROUGH CONFLICT

LESSONS FROM THE STREETS OF NORTHERN IRELAND

7:00 p.m. • Tuesday, April 19, 2011
 282 Lillis Hall • 955 East 13th Avenue



NIGEL GARDINER

Project Coordinator, Ex Prisoners Interpretive Centre
 Commander, Ulster Defence Regiment, Retired
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