

SOA protested in Georgia, Rochester

Rafe Middeke/CNS

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Marking an annual protest that began with 13 people in 1989, thousands of peaceful demonstrators again called for the closing of the former School of the Americas at Fort Benning in Columbus Nov. 16-17.

Now renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, the school trains Latin American soldiers. Graduates of the school have been implicated in the torture, rape and murder of tens of thousands of civilians in Central and South America, including the 1989 assassination of six Jesuits, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador.

Organizers said 11,000 participated this year. By late Nov. 17, 96 people, including six nuns, had been arrested after circumventing the 10-foot barbed-wire fence to enter the base, a trespassing violation. Eighty-eight of them were detained in the county jail; several juveniles in the group were released.

On Nov. 18, 51 protesters were arraigned, with bail set at \$5,000; 43 remained in jail the next day. This year was the first time arrested protesters were not released on their own recognizance.

Prior to the Georgia protest, several Catholics in Rochester, including John Honeck, a parishioner at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish in Brockport, staged their own noontime march against the school Nov. 15. Honeck said 18 peo-



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Protesters begin a silent march Nov. 17 at the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly known as the School of the Americas, at Fort Benning in Columbus, Ga. The facility trains military personnel from Latin American countries, some of whom have been implicated in atrocities against their own populations.

ple, including members of the Catholic peace group Pax Christi, carried crosses bearing names of victims killed by SOA graduates from the Liberty Pole in downtown Rochester to the Federal Building on State Street. At the Federal Building, they read the victims' names as they laid the crosses down in front of the building.

Honeck is a longtime opponent of the SOA, and served three months in federal prison in 2000 for violat-

ing a law prohibiting protesters from crossing a line at Fort Benning. He stated in court that he was compelled to violate the law, in part, because of the example set by Jesuit Father Juan Ramon Moreno, one of six Jesuit priests murdered by SOA graduates in El Salvador in 1989.

"Our actions simply honor him and all the others murdered, raped, disappeared or tortured by the SOA and its agents of repression," Ho-

neck said at the time.

A lector and member of Nativity's social concerns ministry committee, Honeck said he had no doubt the school still served as a tool of repression in Latin America despite its name change.

"The SOA is a U.S.-based terrorist training camp," he said.

He added that it will take many years to get Congress to close the institute.

"I think it's going to be a long, drawn-out struggle," he said. "If the U.S. supports human rights, then it should close down the school and establish a truth commission to investigate the horrors caused by SOA graduates."

The two-day vigil in Georgia closed with a "funeral procession," commemorating Latin American victims of violence. They carried small white crosses bearing names of victims. As the names were read over a loudspeaker, protesters raised the crosses and responded "Presente." The crosses were then placed in the chain-link fence at the entrance of the base.

The annual protest is organized by School of the Americas Watch, founded by Father Roy Bourgeois, Maryknoll missionary, decorated Vietnam War veteran and outspoken critic of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America.

Contributing to this report were Kathrynne Skonicki in Romeoville, Ill., Mary Ann Wyand in Indianapolis, Pat Norby in St. Paul and Rob Cullivan in Rochester.

National Review Board outlines study plans

Jerry Filteau/CNS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Catholic bishops' National Review Board on sexual abuse has outlined its plans to study the issue of clerical sexual abuse and to set benchmarks for measuring diocesan child-protection programs.

It said one subcommittee, headed by former Kentucky Catholic Conference director Jane Chiles, is studying diocesan plans to create a safe environment for children in church ministry and intends to "establish benchmarks" for such diocesan programs.

A subcommittee, headed by Duquesne University law professor Nicholas Cafardi, is working on "the constitutive elements necessary to guarantee due process rights in the procedures used by diocesan review

boards" when they assess sexual-abuse allegations, it said.

The all-lay board reported that it has held listening sessions with victims "to understand firsthand the terrible ordeals through which these aggrieved parties have lived and their continuing resentment over what they view as the inept and callous handling of their cases by the hierarchy."

Leaders of victims' groups "made clear that the single most important corrective action they seek is bishop accountability," the report said.

The report was released following the board's Nov. 11 meeting in Washington.

With media attention focused on the bishops themselves, who were gathered in Washington at the same time to revise their clergy sex-abuse policies and norms, the board's 1,400-

word progress report received little news coverage.

The board said the recent appointment of Kathleen L. McChesney, third-highest official of the FBI, to head the bishops' national Office for Child and Youth Protection "offers the clearest possible signal to the anxious faithful that the urgent challenge of preventing sexual abuse by clergy and safeguarding youths is being undertaken with the utmost seriousness of purpose."

On plans to engage in a "comprehensive study of the causes and context of the current crisis," the board said a subcommittee headed by Washington attorney Robert S. Bennett "is preparing an extensive list of authoritative sources, broadly reflective of the diversity of opinion on the subject. ... It is our intent to take testimony from these individuals in a

series of scheduled sessions in cities across the country" in an effort to search out the roots of the crisis.

On a second study, to assess the nature and scope of the problem, the board said a preliminary review showed that there is little "accurate statistical information available," but "we have been assured that with proper focus and resources this data can be obtained." A subcommittee headed by University of San Diego president Alice Bourke Hayes is researching how that should be done.

The report said the national office will issue its first public annual audit of diocesan policies and practices in 2003, naming those not in compliance with national policy. The National Review Board will review that audit and forward it, with recommendations, to the head of the bishops' conference.