



Church of the Brethren General Board

Resolution to Call for the Close of the School of the Americas

The following action was taken by the Church of the Brethren General Board, assembled in Long Beach, California on July 1, 1997, prior to the 211th Annual Conference.

BACKGROUND

The United States Army School of the Americas was established in Panama in 1946 to promote stability and military cooperation in the Latin American region. In its 50 year history, the School of the Americas has quietly trained over 60,000 troops from Latin America and the Caribbean. In 1984, the school was expelled from Panama by President Jorge Illueca under the terms of the Panama Canal Treaty, who called the School “the biggest base for destabilization in Latin America.”

Recently released training manuals show that soldiers are not instructed in methods to defend their country's borders, but rather in techniques to control their own citizens. In 1996, the White House Intelligence Oversight Board released a report saying that School of the Americas training manuals “condoned or appeared to condone executions of guerrillas, physical abuse, coercion, torture, and false imprisonment.”

For instance, over the past few decades School of the Americas graduates were:

- 43 of the 60 officers cited by the 1993 UN Truth Commission Report as having committed the worst human rights abuses during El Salvador's civil war, including:
 - 19 of the 26 military personnel cited for the 1989 assassination of six Jesuit priests;
 - 10 of the 12 soldiers cited for the El Mozote massacre of over 900 civilians;
 - 2 of the 3 officers cited in the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero;
- over 100 of the 246 Colombian officers cited for war crimes by an international human rights tribunal in 1993;
- 19 of the ranking officers linked to the infamous “Battalion 3-16” death squad, reportedly responsible for thousands of disappearances and deaths in Honduras during the 1980's.

—statistics compiled by School of the Americas Watch

In light of our history and heritage as people of God's peace, we seek to bring the light of truth where there is only darkness and fear. We resolve the following:

WHEREAS Jesus Christ lived and died to bring God's shalom to this broken world and the Church of the Brethren has repeatedly condemned all forms of warfare (Annual Conference 1785, 1918, 1934, 1948, 1957, 1968, 1970);

WHEREAS the 1988 Annual Conference statement Covert Operations and Covert War renounces this type of secretive military operation as contrary to the will of God and more destructive than conventional war; (Additionally, the statement affirms our belief that “Everyone who does evil hates the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.” - John 3:20);

WHEREAS the Church of the Brethren has continued to be involved in peace witness in many areas of the world, including Latin America, and our partners in that region call us to assist in efforts to promote peace and democracy;

WHEREAS soldiers enrolled at the School of the Americas come in largest number from the least democratic nations in the region, and often fulfill the role of propping up a non-elected, military re-c (IO School of the Americas graduates later went on to become the head of their government - not one was democratically elected, and all came to power either by military coup or by overthrow of a democratic government);

WHEREAS the School of the Americas receives an estimated \$20 million annually from the US government to operate the school on the grounds of Fort Benning in Columbus, GA, allowing for the travel and living expenses of the foreign military personnel, and providing Spanish language instruction by US Army officers in counter-insurgency and political suppression;

THEREFORE be it resolved that the Church of the Brethren General Board, assembled in Long Beach, California, on July 1, 1997, calls upon our government to close the US Army School of the Americas. Human rights abuses such as murder, torture, and false imprisonment, as well as political instability and lack of criminal accountability, are all part of the school’s dubious history. The US government must take a leadership role in bringing foreign diplomacy into the open, fostering an honest dialogue between all nations of the earth. We stand with those who have fallen victim to the acts of violence committed by School of the Americas graduates, and call for those who are responsible to be brought into accountability. As people who take seriously Christ’s call to peacemaking, we must oppose our government’s facilitation of these activities so contrary to God’s greatest commandment “love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself” - Luke 10:27.

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