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for immediate release

Contact: Hendrik Voss, SOA Watch, 202.425-5128, hvoss@soaw.org

Nico Udu-gama, SOA Watch, 202-446-6632, nico@soaw.org **Court Dismisses Case**

Against SOA Watch “White House 15”

Fight to Close SOA/WHINSEC Continues

Washington, DC - The case against the fifteen human rights activists arrested on April 10, 2011, for staging a die-in on the White House sidewalk was dismissed today by Judge Frederick Sullivan of the D.C. Superior Court. The government claimed that it was not prepared to proceed with trial, and the charges of *“failure to obey”* and *“blocking and incommoding”* were summarily dropped.

Even though the 15 activists were unable to put the SOA on trial in D.C. Superior Court, they consider this dismissal to be a victory for the movement to close the SOA/WHINSEC and to demand accountability from the government. While initially charged with the traffic violation of *“failure to obey,”* when the activists refused to pay the \$100 associated fine, the prosecution added the second charge of *“blocking and incommoding.”*

The defendants were aided in their case by D.C. lawyers Ann Wilcox and Mark Goldstone.

The SOA Watch movement recognizes this as an effort by the government to intimidate and to stifle dissent. The actions of these SOA Watch activists are part of a growing wave of public discontent with the policies of President Obama, who continues to lead the country down a path of militarization, environmental destruction and war.

“The dismissal of our charges was a sign that we did nothing illegal,” said Alice Gerard, from Grand Island, NY, one of the 15 activists.

“We were exercising our First Amendment rights; however, because our message was critical of governmental policy – namely, continuation of operations at the SOA/WHINSEC – we were summarily arrested and removed.”

The SOA Watch activists affirmed that they were ready to put the SOA/WHINSEC on trial. *“Today we hold this victory in the name of the thousands killed, tortured and disappeared by graduates of the SOA,”*

added defendant Paki Wieland, of Northampton, MA.

The activists were part of a group of 27 individuals who were arrested as they lay on the White House sidewalk, recreating the massacres carried out against the people of Latin America by graduates of the School of the Americas, and demanding that President Obama issue an executive order to close the institution. The School of the Americas, based in Ft. Benning, Georgia, is the U.S. military's flagship Spanish-language training institution, and has graduated some of the worst human rights violators in the hemisphere. In December of 2000, in an effort to divert attention, the Pentagon closed the school; a month later, they opened a new school, in

the same location, with the same instructors and with the same curriculum. The only thing that changed was the name of the school: the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC).

In 2009, two graduates of the SOA/WHINSEC, Romeo Vásquez Velásquez and Luís Javier Prince Suazo, helped lead the coup d'état which overthrew the democratically elected government of Manuel Zelaya, and unleashing a wave of repression against the Honduran people.

SOA Watch works to stand in solidarity with people of Latin America, to change oppressive US foreign policy, and to close the SOA/WHINSEC.

The defendants were:

Alice Gerard, Grand Island, New York
Ann Tiffany, Syracuse, New York
Chris Gaunt, Grinnell, Iowa
David Barrows, Washington, DC
Ed Kinane, Syracuse, New York
Eve Tetaz, Washington, DC
Jack Gilroy, Endwell, New York
Judith Kelly, Arlington, Virginia
Maia Rodriguez, Arlington, Virginia
Megan Felt, Des Moines, Iowa
Nico Udu-gama, Washington, DC
Paki Wieland, Northampton, Massachusetts
Priscilla Treska, Cleveland, Ohio
Sarah Sommers, Cleveland, Ohio
Scott Wright, Washington, DC

School of the Americas Watch
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