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Kissimmee, Florida Resident Risks Six Months in Federal Prison for Nonviolent Civil Disobedience
Theresa Cusimano Arrested for Crossing onto Ft. Benning in Symbolic Action to Shut Down the SOA

Columbus, GA - Theresa Cusimano, 43, a resident of Kissimmee, Florida was arrested on Sunday, November 20, after crossing onto Ft. Benning in an act of nonviolent civil disobedience, calling attention to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, formerly known as the School of the Americas (SOA/WHINSEC), and located within the military base. The annual protest denounced the institute's lack of transparency, its ties to brutal dictatorships throughout Latin America and the ever-growing number of human rights abuses and crimes committed by its graduates.

On Sunday morning, Cusimano climbed over a barbed wire fence to enter the base. Her act of civil disobedience came at the culmination of a protest that drew thousands to the gates of Fort Benning, calling for the schools' closure and a change in US policy towards Latin America. Protestors included actor Martin Sheen and human rights defenders from Honduras, Colombia, Haiti and Costa Rica.

"Our message is not being heard in Congress because our lawmakers have been purchased by other priorities," said Cusimano. "I choose civil disobedience because the lawless acts promoted by the School of the Americas are human rights crimes unfitting of a so-called World Super Power."

Jimena Paz, from the Honduran pro-democracy resistance, came to protest as well. "In my

country SOA graduates continue to repress social movements who stand up against a coup led by graduates of this school right here in Fort Benning," said Paz. Four of the six generals who lead the 2009 Honduran coup were trained at the SOA. Since 2009, state repression against journalists and human rights leaders has brutally intensified, including 120 killings since the military-backed Porfirio Lobo regime took power.

Cusimano was arrested by military police on trespass charges and faces trial next year - her second trial for such actions at Fort Benning. Cusimano also carried her protest onto Ft. Benning in 2008, an act for which she served two months in federal prison. She now faces up to six months. Protests against the SOA/WHINSEC began 21 years ago; since then over 300 people have been sentenced and collectively served over 100 years of prison time for nonviolent civil disobedience.

The SOA/ WHINSEC, a combat training facility for Latin American security personnel made headlines in 1996 when the Pentagon released training manuals used at the school that advocated torture, extortion and execution. SOA Watch is a nonviolent grassroots movement that works to close the SOA/ WHINSEC and to change oppressive U.S. policy.

From November 18-20, 2011, SOA Watch gathered by the thousands at the gates of Ft. Benning in the largest ongoing anti-militarization gathering in the country. They demand that institutions like the SOA/WHINSEC no longer protect the 1%'s corporate greed over the 99% and work to cultivate a culture of peace, mutual respect and justice across the western hemisphere.

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