

Two Opponents of the Controversial Military Training School are Serving 6 Months Prison Sentences. Two More to Go on Trial in Columbus, Georgia on Wednesday, January 5, 2011

On Wednesday, January 5, 2011, Nancy Smith from New York and Chris Spicer from Illinois are scheduled to begin federal trials for carrying the protest against the School of the Americas onto the Fort Benning military base in Georgia. This school, re-named the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation, is a controversial U.S. Army training school for Latin American soldiers.

The defendants face up to six months in prison and a \$5,000 fine for this act of nonviolent civil disobedience. Nancy Smith and Chris Spicer were among the thousands who gathered on November 19-21, 2010 outside the gates of Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia to demand a change in U.S.-Latin America foreign policy and the closure of the School of the Americas (SOA/WHINSEC). Four people peacefully crossed onto Ft. Benning, site of the school, while thousands stood vigil at the gates of Fort Benning in memory of those killed by graduates of the institution. Two of the four, Father Louis Vitale and David Omondi from California plead no contest and were sentenced in November to six months in federal prison.

Nancy Smith and Chris Spicer plead not guilty and are scheduled to go to trial on January 5, 2011. Those arrested at the demonstration crossed the line to protest the school's historical ties to brutal dictatorships throughout Latin America and the ever-growing number of human rights abuses and crimes committed by its graduates. The SOA/WHINSEC made headlines in 1996 when the Pentagon released training manuals used at the school that advocated torture, extortion and execution. The school was in the news again when its graduates led a military coup to overthrow of the democratically elected government of Honduras in June 2009. Nancy Smith and Chris Spicer are scheduled to begin trial at the Federal Court in Columbus, Georgia at 9am on Wednesday, January 5, 2011 before Judge Stephen Hyles, who sentenced Father Louis Vitale and David Omondi to six months in prison last November.

Since protests against the SOA/WHINSEC began 19 years ago, 247 people have served sentences of up to two years for nonviolent civil disobedience.