

OPtions for Justice

San Rafael Dominicans Study – Pray – Proclaim Gospel Values

Judy Lu McDonnell, OP and Lyn Kirkconnell, Justice Promoters

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Dear Friends,

We wanted to share with you the experience of participating in the School of the Americas WATCH (SOA) event at the border wall between Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico in November of this year. You will see this through the eyes of the three of us who attended the event. And we ask you to remember the many who, like San Rafael Dominican Candidate, Theresa Cusimano, spent months in federal prison for protesting the crimes committed in our name through this school. We trust that you will benefit from a broader understanding of the SOA yearly events that we attend in the names of the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael and Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose.

It is important to remember that between 2000 and 2016, 3,052 people have been found dead in their attempt to cross the Sonoran Desert in Arizona. During this fiscal year alone – October 2016 through September 2017, 147 people died as a direct result of US militarization and border policies. This year only 25 people were identified and repatriated for their families to mourn and lay them to rest, and 115 people are yet to be identified, leaving their families to continue to search for answers.

In these days of deep concern for our immigrant brothers and sisters, to raise our voices against injustice is even more urgent. We ask you to join your actions, voices and prayers to the pleas we made while joining with hundreds of young and not-so-young from around the country to say “YES!” to Peace and “NO!” to violence in all its forms.

Judy Lu

Lyn



THE WHAT AND WHY OF THE SOA

In 1990 the School of the Americas (SOA) began in an apartment outside the main gate of Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, by Father Roy Bourgeois, MM. He started with a small group of people of faith. The SOA (now SOA Watch) quickly drew upon the knowledge and experience of many in the U.S. who had worked with the people of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s and had witnessed the atrocities of the Latin American military against their own people. Thousands began to appear at the gates on or around November 16 in commemoration of six Jesuit priests, their co-worker and her teenage daughter who were massacred on that date in 1989 at the University of Central America in San Salvador, El Salvador. By 2003, 10,000 appeared at the gates, many crossing over and risking arrest for being illegally on an army base. Roy has gone to prison innumerable times for the cause of justice and equality.

During those years, and still today, atrocious human rights abuses have been committed against the people of Latin America, many of them proven to have been committed by those trained at the SOA. A US Congressional Task Force reported that those responsible were trained at the U.S. Army School of the Americas at Ft. Benning, Georgia.



Father Roy speaking on 11/12/2017 to the people gathered on the Mexico side of the border wall

In January 2001, faced with mounting pressure to close the SOA, it was quite simply renamed the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). Today, the SOA Watch movement is a large, diverse, grassroots movement, rooted in solidarity with the people of Latin America that has grown to include all peoples who suffer from walls of exclusion and oppression erected against people because of their race, religion, country of origin, sexual preference, economic means, or political beliefs. The goal of SOA Watch is to close the SOA/WHINSEC at Ft. Benning and to change U.S. foreign policy in Latin America by educating the public, lobbying Congress and participating in creative, nonviolent resistance. An even wider goal is justice and opportunity for all peoples and for our Earth Community.

Up until 2015 SOA Watch annually gathered thousands of grassroots activists at Ft. Benning, GA. In 2016 SOA Watch moved the vigil to the border wall in Nogales to protest, not only the continuous human rights abuses by the military who are trained at WHINSEC at Ft. Benning, but also to raise our voices against the wall and the militarization of the border.

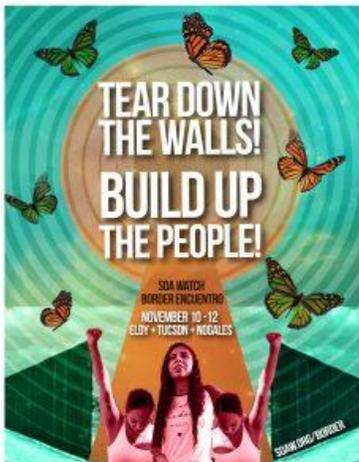
The SOA Mission, as stated on its website, is:

SOA Watch is a nonviolent grassroots movement working to close the SOA / WHINSEC and similar centers that train state actors such as military, law enforcement and border patrol. We strive to expose, denounce, and end US militarization, oppressive US policies and other forms of state violence in the Americas. We act in solidarity with organizations and movements working for justice and peace throughout the Americas.

Our demands:

- An end to US economic, military and political intervention in Latin America
- Demilitarization and divestment of the borders
- An end to the racist systems of oppression that criminalize and kill migrants, refugees and communities of color+
- Respect, dignity, justice and the right to self-determination of communities
- An end to Plan Mérida and the Alliance for Prosperity

TEAR DOWN THE WALLS! BUILD UP THE PEOPLE!



The weekend of November 10-12, 2017, Sisters Anne Dolan and Judy Lu McDonnell and Ms. Lyn Kirkconnell represented the Dominican Sisters of San Rafael and Mission San Jose at the School of the Americas Watch (SOAWatch) Border *Encuentro* in Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, Mexico.

The evening of November 10 there was a vigil at Eloy Detention Center outside Tucson. Opened in 1994 Eloy Detention Center is a private prison contracted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement where immigrants are detained, sometimes for years. The center houses both men and women. An investigation by The Arizona Republic in 2016 found

the center to have the highest number of deaths in the U.S. There have been 15 deaths since 2003 including five suicides.

One of the more moving aspects of the vigil was seeing silhouettes of detainees in windows who communicated with demonstrators by turning lights on and off in their cells and by banging on windows. We learned that the price the detainees pay for this communication is a restriction of their privileges such as visitations with family and legal representation.

From Eloy, participants journeyed on either to Tucson, where there was a gathering Friday evening, or to Nogales where the main events were to begin Saturday morning with a procession to the border (about 1.5 miles from the main hotel and event center), with people holding signs, repeating slogans, and “walking the talk.”



Anne, Judy and Lyn decided to spend Saturday morning on the Mexican side of the wall. Entering Mexico was easy; leaving was harder, with a very long wait at the crossing. We even missed the first workshop of the afternoon because we arrived too late.



Crossing into Mexico



Yet it was a privileged experience to witness the solidarity and yearnings of people on the Mexican side of the wall.

The art work and speeches and songs sounded the call for liberty and freedom and an end to US intervention in Latin America. There were calls for solidarity, poetry of longing and songs of struggle and hope such as this banner from the “Mothers of the Border” that was tied to the wall.

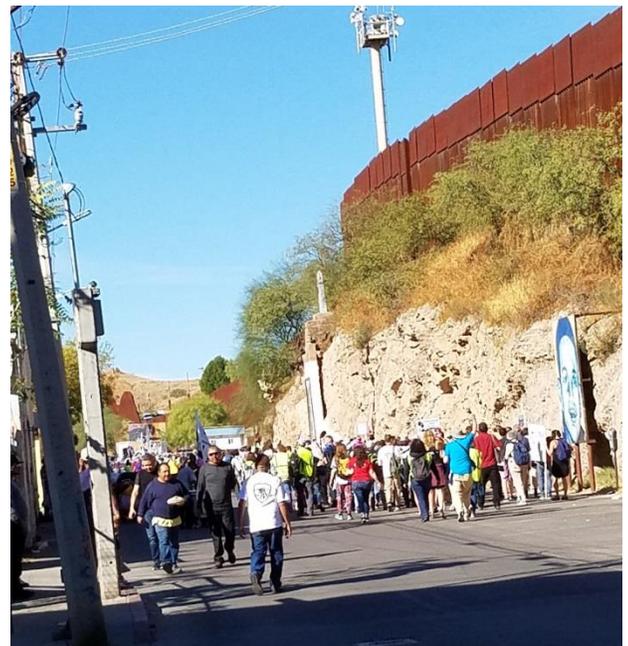
One of the more moving moments included the arrival and participation of a group of activists from Oaxaca who had traveled 3 days to participate. Their journey, the *Caravana Internacional*, included stopping along the way to meet with and lend solidarity to other immigration grass roots groups.



They came from Oaxaca, Puebla, Mexico City, Queretaro, Michoacan, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Sonora. The encounter takes place on both the US and Mexican sides of the wall, and so this group marched toward the stage on the Mexican side, with cheers and support shouted over and through the border wall. They marched for the unity of all peoples and against the walls of

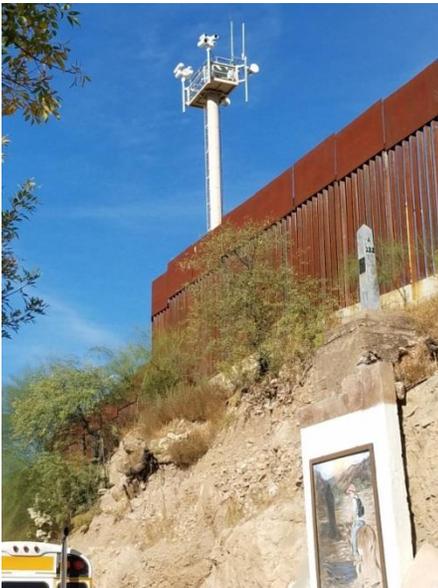
infamy. Their banner said: *"Against paramilitaries and educational reform; For the defense of our land, sovereignty and human rights."*

Art has a way of speaking 1,000 words with one portrait. Our senses were awakened and our souls privileged to share in the pain and hopes of so many people longing for dignity and freedom. The following photo of the wall from the Mexican side, with the US guard towers with lights and cameras (and we were told they may soon have guns, directed by people far away), is just one such image.



Another image was that of a row of crosses at the foot of the wall high atop a cement embankment.

Still another image that was imprinted on our hearts was the one of a boy on a donkey facing an image of death painted on a stone monument at the foot of the hill with the wall and watch tower atop.



Imagine living on either side of the border and knowing, seeing, what happens when families are separated, children are left to fend for themselves; parents

are separated from their children as they try to flee to a life without violence. Whatever happened to: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"? What would Emma Lazarus say at our borders today? What do all religions say about peace, freedom and human dignity?



After returning (slowly) to the US side of the border, we attended some of the workshops such as those summarized below.

"Sanctuary & Faithful Responses in Today's Immigration Context"

presented by Rev. Deborah Lee of Oakland and Interfaith Movement for Human Integrity, National Sanctuary Movement

In this forum, participants were invited to share stories and experiences of immigrant and allied faith communities that are accompanying, advocating for pro-immigrant policies, creating networks of protection and providing housing hospitality as part of a commitment to Sanctuary. Groups shared how they are

addressing different kinds of crises such as detention, deportation, new arrivals, and asylum seekers and helping long term residents become faithful citizens and conscientious voters. Rev. Lee also shared inspiring stories and updates about the sanctuary movement and how it is growing and evolving.

"Merida Initiative and Violence in Mexico", presented by Stop US Arms to Mexico

The United States is sending more guns to Mexico than ever before. These are both legal exports to the military and police, and illegal trafficking used by organized crime – with whom many state forces collaborate. As a result of the US-sponsored drug war and gun trade, Mexico is suffering the highest level of homicides on record. Participants viewed the film, *"Where the Guns Go,"* and discussed actions to stop the industry of killing.

"Prison Imperialism", presented by Alliance for Global Justice, Witness Against Torture

The United States is spreading its model of mass incarceration around the world. The US government has prison management programs in at least 33 different countries, mainly to majority non-white and "developing" nations including Mexico, Honduras and Colombia. Funding is provided as part of the "War on Drugs". These classified, clandestine programs involve the construction of new prisons, prison guard training, and data management. Efforts to end mass incarceration is an international struggle.

"The War of Narrative & its Casualties", presented by Rosa Clemente, Dr. Maha Hilal and Dominique Diaddigo-Cash

Dominant narratives shape the realities of marginalized communities. Many of these narratives exist to paint various communities in negative ways to justify institutional racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia and other forms of oppression. In addition, society, modeling targeting by the government, also plays a role in shaping and reinforcing demonizing and criminalizing narratives of different groups. This workshop examined many of the dominant narratives that exist to justify violence towards our communities and explore alternative narratives that speak to our truths while dismantling oppressive discourse. It was very participative and many stood up to shout and cry their pain: Latinos, LGBT, Muslims, and members of "Black Lives Matter." At the end, Lyn felt deeply her white privilege, but was sorry there had not been more hope expressed as to how to bring us all together.



After a very moving morning and afternoon, we refreshed our souls Saturday evening by celebrating life with long-time friends. We paused in front of a fence on the walk back. And later, we chatted in the dining room with Father Roy and Lil Mattingly, MM, who lives and works in El Paso, and with whom both Judy and Anne spent several weeks last year working with migrant men, women



and children seeking asylum in the US after crossing the border.

On Sunday, there was

Judy, Mary Anne Perrone (former lay missionary who was in Bolivia with Judy and Lyn), Lyn, Jean Stoken (justice promoter for the Sisters of Mercy), and Anne

a solemn gathering, again on both sides of the wall. After some introductory remarks, the solemn **Litany of Remembering** ceremony began with the smudging of participants with desert sage smoke by indigenous peoples from Mexico and Central America.

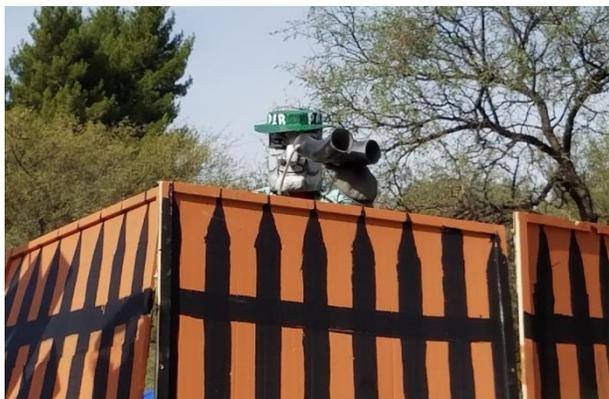


Then, crosses, each with a name of one of the deceased, were raised as people said



"Presente!" upon hearing the name of a man, woman or child who had perished trying to cross the Sonoran Desert in pursuit of her or his dreams of life without oppression and fear. An image of hope saying "tear

down the walls; build up the people” was in the background. This solemn memorial celebration lasted for nearly an hour, with eight cantors singing the names of over 200 people, some who had died in the decades of civil wars and some who had died or disappeared while crossing the Sonoran desert. The sense of passion and compassion were palpable.



After this heart-felt time of tears and prayer, it was time to close this year’s event with popular theatre. This began with an image of the wall with border patrol people atop glaring menacingly at those who would dare to enter “the land of the free and the home of the brave.”

Puppetista border patrol agents and Uncle Sam chased the migrants



from the wall. While the real border patrol officers kept their hilltop distance from the group, we prepared for the much-longed-for freedom that would come, if only in the show.



Suddenly the butterflies and an eagle appeared and flew over and around the wall. This caused the wall



to reverse. It became a land of plenty where people were free as the butterflies and the sun. When the wall was reversed, the reality of racism, militarism and economic exploitation and control were turned into songs of freedom and joy for all that is alive on this planet, our common home.



PERSONAL RELECTIONS

Reflection by Anne Dolan

My strongest lasting impression of the SOA Watch event in Nogales at the border of Arizona, USA and Sonora, Mexico was the peacefulness of the demonstration. The only uniformed law enforcement personnel that I saw were three male and one female



Mexican police officers lined up together passively watching us when we demonstrators were in Sonora on Saturday morning and the woman who checked our passports as we crossed back into Arizona. There were many religious groups represented among, for example the American Friends Service group as well as some male Franciscans in their habits: such people are peacemakers.

The *latino* custom of educating by a dramatic presentation, called *Teatro* in Spanish, was my favorite, the final event on Sunday before we left our gathering on the US side of the Wall. Its small cast was very inclusive in age, gender and ethnicity: its members included a majority of Caucasians, some *latinos* and, among the actors who wore butterfly wings, an African American young man. I took these figures as symbols of freedom since real butterflies can pass through the vertical bars which comprise the Wall in that section. The last member to appear was a blond, blue-eyed eight-year-old boy with a large rotating symbol of the sun.



My sense of this *Teatro* was that the Wall is like a prison with its vertical steel bars placed there by Uncle Sam. He was represented by a ten-foot figure animated by a man inside the lower half of the costume its arms (with sticks attached to them) animated by two other men holding the sticks. We could see into U.S.'s brain, which seemed to be mostly empty. The only other such giant puppet was a spiritual figure of no specific gender portrayed entirely in blue with red tears near its eyes. The backdrop of the outdoor presentation – whose actors began at the backdrop but then mingled among us – was a representation of the Wall. When the spirit replaced Uncle Sam as the principle figure the backdrop was converted into a scene of women and children relaxing by a river with figures of a fish and an eagle flying separately above and around the backdrop. Thus, freedom and enjoyment of nature replaced the Wall.



The Dominican Sisters of San Rafael participate, through the ministry of Judy Lu McDonnell, OP, and Lyn Kirkconnell, in the North American Dominican Promoters of Justice, Peace and Care of Creation.

This group meets nationally and regionally and its efforts are now guided and focused by the *Dominican Call to Justice 2017 - 2019*.

The present National Dominican Call to Justice highlights the following areas:

Climate Justice
Economic Justice
Human Trafficking
Migration and Immigration
Peace and Security for all Life

The San Rafael Dominican Sisters have corporate stances on the following:

**Immigration Reform and Solidarity with Migrants Seeking Asylum,
Sanctuary and Family Unification**
Opposition to the Trafficking of Women and Children
Opposition to the War in Iraq
Abolition of the Death Penalty
Bi-Lateral Nuclear Disarmament and Elimination of Nuclear Weapons

For more information, go to www.domlife.org or contact Lyn Kirkconnell or Judy Lu McDonnell by e-mail at justicepromoter@sanrafaelop.org.

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