

Young Voices

Farmer to Farmer helped three young people attend this year's protest at the School of the Americas this year. Here are their words.



Roberta Popp

Thousands of people converged on Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, on November 19 and 20 for the annual Vigil to Close the School of Assassins. This event has grown into a massive people-power convergence since its beginning in 1990. I was one of ten Farmer to Farmer activists, and one of about nineteen thousand from around the world, to stand together and remember those silenced by SOA violence.

As the weekend's events were getting started, SOA Watch received sad news from the Colombian Peace Community of San José de Apartadó. On Thursday, November 17, troops commanded by General Luis Alfonso Zapata Uribe attacked and killed Arlen Salas David, a leader of the peace community.

General Uribe, who has commanded the 17th Brigade of the Colombian Army since May 2005, was trained in counter-insurgency at the School of the Americas.

More than 10,000 Colombian soldiers have been trained at the SOA. Colombia continues to send more soldiers to the SOA than any other country, with chilling results. Graduates of the school are consistently cited for human rights abuses. The U.S. provides billions in military aid and training to the Colombian military.

Each of us can support the people of Colombia, and many other countries, by working to change U.S. foreign policy, and to close the SOA/WHINSEC.

Music by Francisco Herrera, Anne Feeney, Jon Fromer, Kuumba Lynx and the SOA Watch Musicians Collective kept the crowd inspired and dancing through the emotional weekend. Powerful messages were shouted from Camilo Romero, an organizer with United Students Against Sweatshops, who helped to organize a protest at the Coca-Cola headquarters in Atlanta on Friday; from Patricia Isasa, an Argentinean torture survivor; and Isabel Díaz-Ubillús, a Peruvian organizer and educator; from many unionists of the United Auto Workers; and from Brigida Gonzalez de Cartagena of the San José de Apartadó Peace Community.

I have a hard time putting into words how unbelievably poignant marching in the Solemn Procession was for me. With each victim's name, each "Presente!" chanted, each resounding echo of drum beat, the atmosphere became heavier and heavier. It became harder for me to hold up my cross with the name Juana Tum Sanchez painted on it. She was just one name in a sea of white crosses symbolizing victims of the School of Assassins. I left her cross at the makeshift memorial; she will not be forgotten.

Farmer to Farmer

is organized to build mutual friendship and cultural understanding among rural people so that we might better understand and accompany each other in our common struggles. We seek to promote peace within ourselves, within our community, and across international boundaries. We envision agriculture that is sustainable and respectful of the earth, and one that remains in the hands of the people who live on and work the land. We support grassroots agricultural projects that are democratically initiated and managed. Always, our decisions about a project will be guided by the respect that characterizes the relationship between friends. As an organization, we affirm the sacredness of the earth and shall work for and respect the rights of all people and cultures to self-determination.

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where you can sign up to join our
Yahoo group.

“Young Voices” from the Cover

Wesama Rodpranee Exchange student from Thailand

By participating the SOA Demonstration, I learned a lot. The demonstration taught me how to fight peacefully and made me realize of what a great thing we can do to help others.

I was fascinated by how the protest was organized, and by the peacemakers who broke into the forbidden area and sacrificed their time and prestige



by going to jail in order to create more public awareness. Many other people from all over the United States gathered to help establish this event where they struggled for better lives of people in others countries who they did not even know. There were about 20,000 joining the march. While not a big portion of all the population in America yet, it revealed their concern. Thanks Farmer to Farmer for offering me the opportunity to be a part of such a memorable social activity.

Azamat Khodjakov Exchange student from Uzbekistan

Living in the United States and being in the American community, I am learning more and more every day. The exchange year that I am having now gave me a lot of opportunities to learn about democracy, the political system of the United States of America and the life of the Americans.

This year I had a chance to participate in a demonstration that was against The School of the Americas, in Georgia. That protest gave me a lot of ideas about what it looks like to be an active citizen and always be involved in political and social life.

I am very thankful to The Farmer to Farmer for helping me to get to Georgia and participate at the protest. Being part of the protesters helped me not only to understand the democracy, but also it gave me a chance to meet new people from different parts of the USA. I am very glad that I had the opportunity to participate at a real protest. Very few exchange students do.

I had a very good experience! Now I have a lot of stories about American citizens to tell my friends and family when I go back home.

cover photos are left: Azamat. right top: Birds of peace commemorate the 25th anniversary of the rape and murder of four U.S. churchwomen in El Salvador (Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, & Jean Donovan). Three of the five soldiers responsible were trained at the SOA. right bottom: Vigilers carried crosses with the names of victims of SOA graduates. Photo courtesy of Mike Haskey/Columbus Ledger-Enquirer.

this page, above: Homemade banners adorned the fence police erected to keep the historically nonviolent protest confined to the street.

right: F2F crew, left to right, Wesama, Rick, Azamat, Craig, Jonas, Roberta, Vicky, Kelly, Matt and Lucy. The banner reads “The best defense: Feed the Hungry.”



So Why Bother?

Winston Churchill said, "Never, never, never give up," good advice, I think. Here's a few tidbits of encouragement.

Update on Taco Bell

We won this one. On Wednesday, November 2, Gerardo Reyes of the CIW (Coalition of Immokalee Workers) received the 2005 Business Ethics Network (BENNY) Award in the name of the farmworker community in Immokalee that spearheaded the successful Taco Bell Boycott.

Wanna have some more fun? McDonalds is next. The National Council of Churches has signed on to this latest boycott. We can win this one, too. (www.ciw-online.org)

They're Signing On

One hundred twenty-two non-partisan members of Congress have cosponsored HR 1217, introduced by Rep. James McGovern (D-Mass.), to close and investigate the School of the Americas/WHINSEC. A concerted effort by SOAW members and others had a big impact on this legislation. The SOAW legislative committee thinks we

can pass this bill with 150 cosigners. Rep. Dave Obey (Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District) has not yet signed on. For more details on HR 1217, visit www.soaw.org.

Well, I guess we'll have to do that again!

We're happy to say that recruitment for our January trip to Santiago Atitlán to help work on the community building was a huge success. More than 20 people signed up.

We're excited to get down there and dig in! (Check out the fundraiser below and on the last page, please.) We'll let you know how things work out in the next newsletter. Look for another trip sometime in 2006.

Coffee Coming Out of Our Ears

Not really, but the coffee project is doing well. We have a bunch of new retail and wholesale customers, and the income from the project continues to trend up, despite increased costs. The board will be looking at long-term strategies for the coffee project at a

board retreat in March, and we'll have a report at the annual meeting. Carol will be there, for those of you who don't think "a bunch" is specific enough.

"Nonviolence is not inaction. It is not discussion. It is not for the timid or weak... Nonviolence is hard work. It is the willingness to sacrifice. It is the patience to win."
-Cesar Chavez

This year's annual meeting will be March 19 in rural Glenwood City. Details next time.



Please consider making a special donation to support our building project in January. Farmer to Farmer members are volunteering to finish building the Weaver's Cooperative workshop building. Materials will be about \$7,000. Your support is very important.

Support Our Building Project!

Support the people of Santiago Atitlán!

NAME:

ADDRESS:

e-mail:

___\$15 ___\$25 ___other (extra donations appreciated) \$_____ for hurricane relief

Send to Farmer to Farmer, PO Box 303, Glenwood City, WI 54013.

Farmer to Farmer is a 501(c)3. Your donations are tax-deductible.

F2F responds to Hurricane Stan victims days after mudslides

We listened in horror as reports came in from Santiago Atitlán of the devastating mudslides caused by torrential rains from Hurricane Stan. Sometimes being a small nonprofit is a definite advantage. We decided to respond immediately by sending \$1,000 to the community of our friends in Santiago Atitlán.

“We realized it wasn’t a lot,” said Andy Gaertner, F2F board president, “especially when you spread it between all the families, but Rosa told me our help was like a breath of fresh air, to know there were people out here watching out for them, and willing to help.”

Andy learned in his conversation with Rosa that there were immediate shortages of everything, even in the more self-sufficient communities. Many roads were closed. Everybody was out of work, a desperate situation when so many live week to week. The number of dead and missing was overwhelming. It was a difficult and desperate time. “The money was able to tide people over, just getting people back to where jobs are starting up again,” said Andy.

The bulk went to three families who experienced the most difficulty. Diego and his family’s house was inundated with mud. They have been able to clean it up, and are back in their house. Nicolas was able to find temporary shelter, and will rebuild his house, which was near the soccer field.

The mudslides were particularly devastating for Concepción, a widow with three children, who was just recently able to build her own home. Her house site is now part of an area the government closed and set aside as a mass grave. The area was quickly closed to excavation, and she was not able to retrieve any of her belongings. “They barely escaped with their lives,” said Andy.

Some help is forthcoming. The government pledged to help individuals rebuild in a new area, and NGOs are participating. Local populations, already impoverished, are threatened with starvation.

If you’d like to help, a Farmer to Farmer crew will be going to Santiago Atitlán in January. If you’d like to send aid funds with us, you can (just write a note that you’d like your donation to go to Hurricane relief). You can also go to puebloapueblo.org, which is working to rebuild the new hospital (see our

Help Send Sadie South

Join us for a benefit fundraiser at the Windrow Cafe in Prairie Farm to help Sadie go to Guatemala with F2F in January. The meal will be cooked by her parents, Donna Goodlaxson and Jim Bruns.

Friday, January 6

6 pm dinner, \$12 for adults
Venison, roasted vegetables and more. (kids eat free)

8 pm live music with host Kisten Gillespie
dessert and cash bar

silent auction ends at 10 pm
Don’t need to be present to win.

Please RSVP to Donna (455-1663) for dinner. No reservations needed for music and dessert.



FARMER to FARMER

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THE DATE AFTER YOUR NAME IS YOUR MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DATE.