

SUNDAY EVENING

97-GS-20 VOTED: The Twenty-first General Synod adopts the Resolution "Calling for the Close of the U.S. Army School of the Americas," as amended.

RESOLUTION "CALLING FOR THE CLOSE OF THE U.S. ARMY SCHOOL OF THE AMERICAS"

WHEREAS, the training of military leaders from the countries of Central America has occurred at the School of the Americas, U.S. Army training center at Fort Benning, Georgia, which is completely funded by U.S. tax dollars at the cost of \$5.8 million a year;

WHEREAS, the School of the Americas teaches such things as assassination training, commando operations, counter-insurgency techniques, intelligence-gathering, psychological warfare, death threats, extortion, sniper training, and low-intensity conflict;

WHEREAS, the United Nations Truth Commission Report on human rights abuses in El Salvador reports that over 75 percent of those cited by the Truth Commission for murder, torture and "disappearances" were trained at the School of the Americas;

WHEREAS, the same report states that ten of the twelve officers of the Salvadoran army battalion that carried out the massacre in El Mozote in December 1981, when more than 800 unarmed peasants were killed, were trained at the School of the Americas;

WHEREAS, it has been established that people of faith, working in solidarity with people in Central America, have been murdered by soldiers trained at the School of the Americas, namely those responsible for the assassinations of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the four North American church women, the six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, all in El Salvador;

WHEREAS, Pentagon documents released to the School of the Americas Watch, in September 1996, through the Freedom of Information Act, show that 1991 training manuals at the School of the Americas included instruction in such things as extortion, assassination, threats and torture;

WHEREAS, "Inside the School of the Americas," a documentary on the School of the Americas released by Richter Production Films in November 1996, contains clips of several students of the School who admit, on camera, that they were trained in torture techniques, using abducted Panamanians as their live experimental subjects;

WHEREAS, nationwide outrage over the school's activities continues to grow. For example, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has now passed resolutions in two subsequent years calling for the closing of the School of the Americas; the 800 churches in the United Methodist Church of East Ohio did likewise at their June 1996 annual meeting; over 400 people gathered in Fort Benning, Georgia in November 1996 to protest the School, up from 30 people who protested there at the same time in 1995; and some American protestors have received jail sentences for their actions, including Father Roy Bourgeois, of the School of the Americas Watch, who was jailed for six months in 1996;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Congress is currently reducing Federal spending and this is one of the programs that could be cut;

WHEREAS, this history and the continued existence of the school stand in the way of moving our country's relationships with Latin America towards emphasis on human rights and democracy;

WHEREAS, we as Christians and specifically as members of the United Church of Christ have committed ourselves to pray, study, and act on behalf of peace, justice and the integrity of all Creation;

WHEREAS, the call of the Biblical witness to "do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him or her who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless and the widow, nor shed innocent blood..." (Jeremiah 22:3);

WHEREAS, Jesus said, in the Sermon on the Mount, "blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9);

WHEREAS, Isaiah 58:9b-12 says: "All you need to do is to stop oppressing the weak, stop making false accusations and stop spreading vicious rumors! Feed the hungry! Help those in trouble! Then your light will shine out from the darkness and the darkness around you shall be as bright as day. And the Lord will guide you continually, satisfy you with all good things, keep you healthy, too; and you will be like a well-

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watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. Your sons will rebuild the long-deserted ruins of your cities, you will be known as The People Who Rebuild Their Walls and Cities."

WHEREAS, we, as children of God, are called to love our neighbors as ourselves; and

WHEREAS, Archbishop Oscar Romero, in his sermon the day before he was assassinated by graduates of the School of the Americas, said: "I beg you, I implore you, in the name of God, I order you: Stop the violence! Stop the repression! You must obey a higher law: Thou shall not kill!";

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Twenty-first General Synod through the President of the United Church of Christ calls upon the U. S. Congress and the Executive Branch to close the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that through the President of the United Church of Christ, the Twenty-first General Synod asks the U.S. Department of Justice to investigate why assassination, torture and related acts of violence were included as subjects in the training manuals for the School of the Americas;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-first General Synod requests the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ to request an implementing body or bodies such as the Office of Church in Society and the United Church Board for World Ministries to work with Conferences in ways that will empower action, including, but not limited to:

- (a) Developing a study packet to be used in congregations to enable United Church of Christ members to have the opportunity to become aware of this challenge for justice and healing;
- (b) Facilitating a School of the Americas Watch Committee within the United Church of Christ to monitor developments concerning the school until the time that the school is finally closed;
- (c) Encouraging individual churches in the United Church of Christ to sponsor a yearly School of the Americas Watch Sunday, in order to inform members of the progress achieved on this challenge, beginning in 1997, and continuing until the School is closed. (Recommended Sundays are during the times of commemoration of victims of the Americas graduates: November 16, when six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, were assassinated in 1989 at the University of Central America. On this date, people from across the U.S. vigil at the gates of the School of the Americas; December 2, when the four U.S. churchwomen were executed in El Salvador in 1980; March 24, when Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated in 1980.);

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-first General Synod endorses continued efforts by School of the Americas Watch in Fort Benning, Georgia, Washington, D.C. and local Central American solidarity organizations across the country, to push for closing of the School of the Americas; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that the Twenty-first Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages church members to communicate directly with their Congressional Representatives, Senators, and the United States President, about this challenge.

Financial Implications: For the United Church of Christ, there will be minor costs, such as the cost of preparing study packets and the cost of postage for mailing letters and informational materials. For the implementing body, there will be costs associated with sponsoring educational programs and advocacy efforts with regard to the resolution.

Subject to the availability of funds.