

Delegation and Direct Action at the Border

## Transcending the Border to End Militarization

Ten SOA Watch delegates just returned from a week long visit to the border between El Paso and Ciudad Juarez, from February 12-19, organized in conjunction with Project Punte. Delegates visited with human rights organizations, farm-workers, students, women's groups, parents of the disappeared and immigration activists on both sides of the border to understand more about militarization in the border region. The delegation ended with a bi-national rally at the border fence to remember the martyrs. SOA Watch founder Fr. Roy Bourgeois and SOA Watch field organizer Nico Udu-gama were arrested after joining the vigil on the Mexican side and crossing back across the border.



After being held for 3 hours at the Santa Teresita (New Mexico) detention center, Roy and Nico were informed that they would not be prosecuted and were released. From a report back by Nico:

*"It was the mud that I first noticed as we were escorted into the holding cell at the Santa Teresita Customs and Border Patrol station. Dried mud, on the cement floor, in chunks, broken up, trails of dust; even on the hard benches, next to a small pile of woolen blankets and a muddy pair of sweatpants. Next to used apple juice containers, stacked one inside the other, which had given some small relief. The mud in that detention center was our reminder that someone before us had endured the harsh desert conditions, seeking a better life, only to be stopped, detained and probably sent back across the border. We were released 3 hours after being detained; the charges of "entry without inspection" had been dropped. The challenges facing the previous detainees were higher. Would they try to cross again, risking imprisonment or even death in the desert? Or would they go back home, condemned to a life of poverty and violence?"*

Read the full report back here. [Click here](#) for more pictures from the Sunday action.

Over 60,000 people have been killed in the violence in Mexico since President Felipe Calderon deployed some 50,000 troops and federal police five years ago to confront the drug cartels. Much of this militarization has been bankrolled by the US government's Merida Initiative, which has poured over \$1.5 billion into this "war on drugs," especially in the form of US military equipment and training. The result of this militarization has failed to curtail the flow of drug, but has caused the loss of thousands of innocent Mexican lives. The death toll in Ciudad Juarez alone is nearing 10,000.



Perpetrators of the violence on both sides of this declared "war" have strong links to the US School of the Americas/WHINSEC. Ciudad Juarez Police Chief, Julian Leyzaola Pérez, accused of torture, arbitrary detention and violence against activists, is another graduate of this infamous school (read a UNHCR report that cites Leyzaola here.) On the side of the drug cartels, at least one third of the original members of the drug cartel known as the "Zetas" are deserted members of the Mexican military who have graduated from the SOA/WHINSEC.

The struggle for a just immigration policy is deeply rooted in the struggle for economic justice and an end to militarization. We encourage you to come to Washington, DC, from April 14-17 to take the struggle for justice and peace to the halls of power! Mobilize your networks, spread the word and let's keep onward!

In solidarity,  
SOA Watch