

Lisa Sullivan Presentation  
September 2009  
Background Information

While in recent years most of the attention of U.S. citizens to foreign policy has been focused on the Middle East, our neighbors in Latin America have been forging a brand new political landscape based on values that they are terming “dignity and sovereignty”. Eleven countries south of the Rio Grande have elected progressive presidents over the past ten years, some far to the left, others just slightly left of center, but together they are turning the political panorama of Latin America upside down.

When the economic elites of these countries felt their interests threatened, graduates of the School of the Americas stepped in. In Bolivia, several people were killed when SOA graduates authorized the use of force against a mostly indigenous crowd, clamoring that more of Bolivia’s gas profits be directed to the impoverished nation. In Venezuela, SOA graduates carried out a coup against President Chavez in 2002 after he affirmed the nationalization of the country’s massive oil reserves. In only 36 hours, however, the Venezuelan people reversed the coup. Only a month ago, Honduran Joint Chief of Staff and Air Force commander – both SOA graduates, ordered soldiers to whisk President Manuel Zelaya out of the country at gunpoint after he began to promote changes that benefited the poor majority of his country, in a coup resoundingly condemned worldwide.

The School of the Americas is a bellwether of the profound changes taking place in the south. After 5 decades of sending 60,000 of their military to this training facility run by the U.S. Army, some countries have said “no más” to training soldiers there. Five countries have announced that they will no longer send troops to this school that is sometimes referred to as the “School of Assassins” due to the thousands of deaths from the Rio Grande to Patagonia linked to its graduates.

Lisa Sullivan, Coordinator for the School of Americas Watch “Partnership Latin America” (PAL) will be in Seattle from September 27 - 29, speaking about the changes taking place in Latin America and the role of the SOA. Along with other members of the PAL team and Fr. Roy Bourgeois, she has visited 17 Latin American countries over the past 3 years, meeting with leaders - including 7 presidents - to discuss the issue of the SOA. These visits, along with pressure from partners in Latin America, led to the announcement by Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Costa Rica of withdrawal from the SOA.

Lisa has lived in Latin America for 32 years, most of this time in Venezuela, but also in Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Chile and Guatemala. She will also share her perspective, as a Maryknoll Lay Missioner and a mom who raised her kids in the barrios of Barquisimeto, of the changes taking place in Venezuela under the “Bolivarian Revolution”. Lisa was also recently in Honduras, both immediately before and after the coup, and will share her observations, along with concerns for the U.S. response and the dangerous implications that this coup has for all of Latin America.

Link to photos and information:

<http://www.soawlatina.org/visitas.html>

[www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org)

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