

# The Michigan Daily

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## United in protest

### 10,000 rally to close School of Americas

By Shomari Terrelonge-Stone  
Daily Staff Reporter

COLUMBUS, Ga. — Thirty-five University students of the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice along with an estimated 10,000 faith, labor and student leaders from around the world traveled here to protest the U.S. School of Americas in Fort Benning yesterday.

The 10th annual demonstration commemorated the Nov. 16, 1989, killings in El Salvador of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter.

SOA was founded in 1946 in Panama and was later relocated to Fort Benning, Ga. in 1984. The University students and protesters alleged that hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans had been tortured, raped, massacred and assassinated by SOA graduates.

Ignoring threats of arrest, 5,000 protesters crossed onto Fort Benning property in a

See RALLY, Page 7A



DAVID ROCHKIND/Daily

ABOVE: One of 10,000 protesters is escorted off Fort Benning property by Columbus, Ga. police yesterday in a demonstration against School of Americas. Most demonstrators were bused to a nearby park. BELOW: Actor and social activist Martin Sheen kneels in protest of SOA.



### Sides feud over SOA's role in Latin American atrocities

By Shomari Terrelonge-Stone  
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COLUMBUS, Ga. — Rufina Amaya witnessed the massacre at El Mozote in El Salvador on Dec. 12, 1981, when the Salvadoran Army systematically murdered more than 1,000 men, women and children. For seven days and nights, she said she hid alone in the hills near the small town, where she knelt down and prayed behind an apple shrub with no food or water.

This past weekend, 18 years later in Fort Benning, Ga. — dressed in a pink sweater, blue skirt and black sandals — Amaya described what was done to her as “a plan to instill fear and terror.” She said the El Salvadoran government “killed innocent children.”

But what resonated with others this weekend during the annual protest of the U.S. School of Americas in Columbus, Ga., where Ft. Benning is located, was more than Amaya's descriptive story of atrocity. It was her claim that the massacre would not have occurred if top Salvadoran military offi-

cial had not graduated from SOA.

Surrounded by much controversy throughout its more than 50-year existence, SOA has graduated about 60,000 Latin American and 1,500 American cadets, officers and government civilians.

Critics refer to SOA as the “School of Assassins,” holding the school accountable for the oppression, death and suffering of women, children and the economically disadvantaged in Latin America.

But SOA supporters deny these allegations and say the school provides relevant military training and education to countries in Latin America and the Caribbean while promoting democracy and respect for human rights and cooperation between the militaries of the western world. Supporters also say SOA teaches democratic values to the United States and Latin Americans who fill the school's classrooms.

SOA originated in 1946 in Panama as a Latin American Training Center during a time when the

See SOA, Page 7A