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Dozens arrested at SOA rally, organizers call police action inappropriate

Joshua J. McElwee | Nov. 21, 2010 NCR Today

COLUMBUS, Ga. -- Twenty-six activists were arrested here Saturday afternoon during a rally at the gates of the Fort Benning military complex during the annual School of Americas Watch vigil.

The arrests came as the rally was concluding for the afternoon. Hundreds of activists had gathered at the edge of the boundary of the designated area for demonstrations, facing towards a nearby shopping center while chanting slogans.

Police stood directly opposite the activists. As the activity continued policed warned activists that they would be arrested for unlawful gathering if they stepped across the boundary as a group.

Most of the activists then dispersed or stayed behing the boundary. In the mix of people leaving the rally, police began making arrests. Among those rounded up were two journalists with RT America.

Speaking to *NCR* Saturday night, Alice Ollstein, an SOA Watch organizer, called the police action inappropriate.

Said Olstein: "The police were acting out of control and completely inappropriately."

The bond for those arrested in the group was set between $4,000 and $5,500. Their arraignment is expected Sunday afternoon.

As the action on the boundary of the designated gathering area was taking place, two other activists were arrested for walking onto Fort Benning. Nancy Smith and Franciscan Fr. Louis VItale walked onto the base and were taken into custody.

Vitale and Smith have been charged with federal trespass and face up to six months in prison.

To see more coverage from Columbus, Ga., scroll down through the **NCR Today blog** [1].

***NCR* took photos of the arrests. See the slideshow below. During the rally,*NCR* spoke with Vitale, who you can see in the clip below giving some history of the SOA Watch vigil and describing why he came to Fort Benning on Saturday.**

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