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SOA Watch activists arrested after protest against border militarization

Patrick O'Neill | Feb. 20, 2012

School of the Americas Watch founder Fr. Roy Bourgeois and SOA Watch associate Nico Udu-gama were held for three hours and released after a protest along the Mexico-New Mexico border Sunday.

The protest involved 10 people who part of Project Puente's weeklong "border immersion experience." ("Puente" is Spanish for "bridge.")

Officers with the Santa Teresa Border Patrol took Bourgeois and Udu-gama into custody after they crossed into Mexico during a prayer service at the border, Project Puente spokesperson West Cosgrove told *NCR*. The two were released after three hours and no charges were filed.

"Over 60,000 people have been killed in the violence in Mexico since President Felipe Calderón deployed some 50,000 troops and federal police five years ago to confront the drug cartels," Cosgrove wrote in a press release. "Much of this militarization has been bankrolled by the U.S. government?s Merida Initiative, which has poured over $1.5 billion into this war on drugs, especially in the form of U.S. 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."

Cosgrove said Bourgeois and Udu-gama crossed into Mexico, which is not illegal, and were taken into custody after they re-entered the United States "without inspection," which is required under U.S. immigration laws. The nearest legal point of entry was a bridge about 10 miles away from the protest site, Cosgrove said.

Cosgrove said the group had been reading aloud the names of people who had died in the desert in failed attempts to cross the Mexico-U.S. border.

Bourgeois has spent more than four years in prison for acts of nonviolent civil disobedience protesting U.S policy on Latin America. He lives in Columbus, Ga., outside the gates of Ft. Benning, home to the U.S. Army's Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (formerly the School of the Americas), a school that trains Latin American soldiers. Some graduates of the school have been implicated in human rights violations and killings in their native countries.

Cosgrove said last week SOA Watch supported a national forum against militarization in Mexico.

"SOA Watch stands in solidarity with them and draws inspiration from citizens of Mexico who have been rising up to resist this militarization," Cosgrove wrote.

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