

2011 GRINNELL COLLEGE STUDENTS AT SOA DEMONSTRATION

We left Grinnell around 5 pm on Thursday, and arrived at Franklin D. Roosevelt State Park by noon-ish on Friday. After a little bit of an adventure in our search for our particular campsites, we quickly set up camp and boarded the bus to the Columbus Convention Center. Friday afternoon and evening were filled with teach-ins and workshops. These included: a Colombia teach-in, presented by one of the foremost scholars on Colombia and drug trafficking and a Colombian community leader, a workshop presented by SOAWatch researchers on how to successfully research militarism, a teach-in on the current junta in Honduras presented by a Honduran professor and a Honduran activante with SOAWatch, and countless other information sessions, of which there were too many to attend them all. One of the coolest parts of Friday was, at the start of the research work shop, all the attendees introduced themselves, and we were able to hear a little about the work of professionals in fields including academia, law, clergy and medicine who have been able to make human rights advocacy the core of their careers. Moreover, all of these professionals were very excited to talk to us about their work, and about how we can pursue social justice in more meaningful ways.

On Saturday there was a rally at the gates of Fort Benning. The area was filled with human rights advocacy groups, we spent hours learning more about ways in which we can continue to promote social justice. There was a tangible energy of excitement, thousands of people gathered together united for a single goal of making a positive difference in the world. After the rally, everyone returned to the Convention Center for meetings on topics ranging from youth involvement to the Israeli-Palestine conflict. On Sunday we woke up early and returned to the gates of Fort Benning for the vigil. The vigil began with recognition of the effects that SOA graduates have had on individual Latin American countries, and then proceeded into a processional. During the processional SOAWatch leaders chanted the names and ages of victims of SOA graduates. With each name, the vigil participants raised crosses, and other objects, all with names and ages of victims written on them, and chanted presente. In doing so we recognized their deaths, something that their murderers had prevented. Once we processed to the gates, we placed our crosses on the fence to create a memorial for all those murdered by SOA graduates. The vigil was very moving, thought provoking and inspiring. Thank you so much for making this profound experience possible.