

**STATEMENT OF GREG COLERIDGE ON DOD SPYING OF AFSC  
ACLU Press Conference, January 24, 2006**

The Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker peace, justice and humanitarian organization, condemns the action of the Department of Defense (DOD) for their spying on Akron area citizens who took part in a peaceful and lawful march and rally in Akron on March 19, 2005 to commemorate the second anniversary of the start of the Iraq war. We are outraged that the Pentagon would spy on citizens who were doing nothing more than expressing their First Amendment freedom of speech and freedom of assembly rights against the war and occupation of Iraq.

More than 200 Akron area citizens gathered at Perkins Park on March 19, 2005. We marched to a military recruitment center where a Brethren and person connected to the Akron Catholic Worker community spoke. We then marched to the local office of the FBI where an immigration attorney holding up a copy of the US Constitution and Bill of Rights spoke. We then proceeded to the Federal Building in downtown Akron for a rally, where several people offered remarks, including two people with AFSC. At the end, we read the names of more than 1500 killed US troops in Iraq and more than a 1000 Iraqis killed. We then deposited those names in two cardboard coffins, which a few days later we delivered to the offices of Senators Mike DeWine and George Voinovich. We also spilled water with a little red food coloring from a 55-gallon drum on the sidewalk to symbolize the blood being spilled on all sides in Iraq and that the war was for oil and greed.

For these actions, our own government spied on us. We publicized our event widely beforehand as a peaceful march and rally. We didn't block traffic. We didn't destroy property. We didn't threaten anyone in our speeches. Yet, we were photographed and monitored by our own government and showed up on the DOD database.

This is chilling, intimidating, and outrageous. This should be totally unacceptable in a democratic society. Citizens were exercising their rights as guaranteed in the Bill of Rights under the United States Constitution. Yet our own government considered these actions a "threat." In fact, according to the DOD document where our march and rally is listed, the event is still considered to be "Open/Unresolved." What does that mean?

Any government that considers its own citizens threatening who in a public space speak freely, assemble freely, and organize freely is itself a threat to freedom and democracy. Yet the US government today considers threatening human persons who exercise their First Amendment rights but at the same time continues to protect the constitutional free speech rights of business corporations who corrupt and pervert our political system through political campaign contributions and lobbying under the guise of "free speech." The US government sneaks into meetings unannounced and uninvited and claims it's legal yet wouldn't dream about sneaking onto the private property of a business corporation without a warrant, claiming that corporations have the 4th Amendment protections against unwarranted searches and seizures.

This is a clear double standard, a hypocrisy. The government honors, protects, and affirms the constitutional "so-called" rights of business corporations but ignores, if not tramples, on the rights of human beings. What does this say about the priorities of our nation?

It is time we place the rights and powers of people over the rights and powers of the Department of Defense and business corporations. Securing all files the government has on the political activities on American citizens is an important beginning to take back what we have at this point lost, if we ever had to begin with – our freedom and democracy.